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## **The Power of a Paradoxical Persona: An Analysis of John Peel's Radio Talk and Career at the BBC**

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Richard P. Winham entitled "The Power of a Paradoxical Persona: An Analysis of John Peel's Radio Talk and Career at the BBC." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Communication and Information.

Paul Ashdown, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Barbara Moore, Naeemah Clark, Michael Keene

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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THE POWER OF A PARADOXICAL PERSONA: AN  
ANALYSIS OF JOHN PEEL'S RADIO TALK AND CAREER  
AT THE BBC

A Dissertation  
Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee. Knoxville

Richard P. Winham  
May 2008

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Hazel Winham, whose belief in the value of education inspired me to take on and finish this project.

## **Acknowledgments**

I wish to express my sincere and heartfelt gratitude to the many people who have helped me complete my communications doctorate degree in broadcast management. I particularly owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Paul Ashdown for his patience and valuable insights as an editor, as well as for his guidance and advice during the research and writing of this dissertation. I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Barbara Moore and Dr. Naeemah Clark for their helpful comments, and I am especially grateful to Dr. Michael Keene for his continuing friendship and encouragement. Without the help of Administrative Services Assistant, Diana King, my life as a graduate student would have been measurably more difficult. Finally, I would like to express my love and gratitude to my wife, Elizabeth, for her invaluable support, suggestions, and encouragement throughout this project.

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## **Abstract**

John Peel holds a unique place in British broadcasting history. During his almost 40-year career as a DJ on the BBC's Radio One and Radio Four, he not only introduced innovative music—including psychedelia, reggae, punk, hip hop, grunge and electronica—into the British mainstream, but championed hundreds of musicians whose work might otherwise have gone unnoticed. Using Peel as a case study, this research focuses on the role his persona played in three distinct aspects of his success: (1) his ability to attract audiences across several generations; (2) his longevity at the BBC, a bastion of conservative bureaucracy; and (3) his impact on the programming on BBC's Radio One and on British popular music in general. Drawing on the theories of persona developed by Horton and Wohl (1956) and Goffman (1971, 1981), the study offers a rhetorical analysis of Peel's broadcast talk to explicate the role of persona in his success.

By creating a persona based on selection, omission and emphasis of contradictory traits, Peel presented himself as an Everyman able to pull listeners onto his public platform while placing himself simultaneously in their worlds. Far from the artificial and static persona conceptualized by Horton and Wohl (1956), Peel's on-air persona was paradoxical and flexible—traits that enhanced his credibility and help explain his unprecedented tenure as a DJ on Radio One and appeal as the host and writer for a talk program on Radio Four. The study ends with a discussion of the conditions required and extent to which it is possible for a single individual such as Peel to have a significant impact on social and cultural change.



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# Chapter One

## Introduction

Words like ‘legend’ and ‘institution’ are bandied about too freely in the media, often lavished on dullards who should have been dragged outside and shot years earlier, but in Peel’s case both terms can be applied with a clear conscience....[Peel] ‘is actually the most important individual in the development of British rock music’ (Sweeting, *The Guardian*, 1993).

As a radio personality, John Peel holds a unique place in British broadcasting history. His death in October 2004 was a front-page story in the national print press in the United Kingdom, as well as on radio and television. The extent of the attention his death received in the press as well as on radio and television was unprecedented for someone in his position (Long, 2006). The significance of this event stretched far beyond the relatively narrow confines of his 40-year career as a DJ on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Indeed, one writer compared media reaction to Peel’s death to that of John Lennon, Freddie Mercury and George Harrison (Inglis 2005: 407). Even Prime Minister Tony Blair, who publicly declared himself “genuinely saddened by the news” and referred to Peel as a “genuine one-off,” acknowledged the passing of a British icon (Lawson, 2004).

Peel was also lionized in the popular music press in articles exemplified by a front-page story in the weekly *New Musical Express* (NME), which carried a banner headline hailing him as a “Hero. Legend. Good Bloke” (November 6, 2005). In 1994, the same paper had awarded him its “Godlike Genius” prize in

recognition of his role as an arbiter of taste in popular music in the United Kingdom. It was a tacit recognition of the symbiotic relationship between Peel and the music press. Whereas Peel gained credibility and authenticity, particularly early in his career, from the attention he received from popular music publications, the role of the music press as arbiters of taste was also substantiated by Peel's regular references to their opinions on his radio programs.

Outside the United Kingdom the news of Peel's passing evoked a similar response, as listeners from around the world expressed their grief in thousands of messages posted on the BBC's website. Peel's idiosyncratic musical taste and antipathy toward the more commercial aspects of the music business and music radio programming had clearly made him a cult hero. "In a culture obsessed with media glitz and sham," wrote one fan, "for me John was one of a tiny number who always kept the person in personality." Another called Peel the personification of "the very great things about the BBC—humanity, compassion and intelligence. So many people will miss the sound of that wonderfully resonant voice" (BBC 2005).

Although a number of radio DJs have achieved fame during their careers (e.g. Alan Freed, Wolfman Jack and Tom Donahue in the United States; Kenny Everett, Tony Blackburn, and Brian Matthew in the United Kingdom), the magnitude of Peel's popularity, as evidenced by the response to his death by music scholars, critics, and fans alike, confounds previous notions of the cultural role and status of the radio DJ, a subject that has received relatively scant attention in the academic literature. No other radio DJ in history has come close to

receiving the kind of recognition bestowed on Peel (See for example the BBC's website, "Keeping it Peel," 2004-2008).

All of this attention stands in stark contrast to Peel's own carefully constructed on-air persona. Soft-spoken and often apparently uncomfortably self-conscious, he had the affect and passion of an enthusiastic amateur. In a column he wrote for the music weekly *Disc and Music Echo* in 1969, reproduced as a frontispiece in his posthumous biography, Peel made it clear that he had no time for the show-business hyperbole surrounding his profession, an attitude that led many writers to describe him as "self-deprecating" (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 62-3).

His own assessment of the role he played was characteristically blunt:

It is obvious that disc-jockeys, as a class, are essentially parasitic. We are, with lamentably few exceptions, neither creative nor productive. We have, however, manipulated the creations of others (records) to provide ourselves with reputations as arbiters of public taste. There is no more reason (nor no less) why I should be writing this column than you—however I am in this unmerited position and you're not. I believe very much in radio as a medium of tragically unrealized possibilities and also in the music I play....These musicians have made you aware of, and appreciative of, their music—not J. Peel (Peel and Ravenscroft 2005: 6).

In a similar way, Peel also downplayed his influential role as a music-business "mediator" (Negus, 1996) or what Bourdieu (2004) referred to as a "cultural intermediary," a tastemaker who stands between producers and consumers. In the sense that Peel exercised considerable power over which and how often artists received exposure on his programs, he clearly fit Frith's (1981) and Hirsch's (1990) description of a music "gatekeeper," a concept that they used to refer to the network of media music writers, promoters, agents, radio DJs and

others who ultimately control the fates of professional musicians. Rather than emphasizing his professional status, gatekeeping role, and power to make or break performers (which other DJs in his position have certainly done), Peel constructed the on-air persona of a surrogate for his listeners through his “I’m-just-a-fan-like-you” mode of address and self-characterization.

### **Dissertation Focus and Purpose**

Central to this study is the question of Peel’s on-air persona, including its characteristics, cultivation, and consequences for Peel’s efficacy as a “cultural intermediary” (Bourdieu 1984). Drawing on the work of Horton and Wohl (1956) and Erving Goffman (1981), the study offers a rhetorical analysis of Peel’s radio talk in terms of the development of his broadcast *persona* and the historical and cultural contexts in which he conducted his four-decade career. The theoretical concepts of *parasocial relations* and *authenticity* (Guignon, 2004) are also used to explain how Peel attained broad popular appeal and influence. Peel’s persona and the music he played were inextricable. Both played on and were a product of his “outsider” status, his “stubborn resistance to the established policies of the popular music industry and his insistent championing of new musicians marked him out as one of the few real subversives in a commercial and creative environment in which such tendencies are not easily tolerated” (Inglis, 2005, 407).

To place the development and impact of Peel’s on-air persona within its appropriate cultural and historical contexts, it is necessary to examine two major aspects of his broadcasting career. The first relates to his early music- and radio-related experiences and influences, which include his employment as a DJ in the

United States in the mid-1960s. And the second deals with his long career at and influence on the BBC and its music programming. Related to the latter, this study examines how Peel, who was not only famously at odds with much of the programming on Radio One, but who had a reputation for having little patience with conventional attitudes or mores, managed to build such a long and successful career within the BBC, a bastion of the British establishment. Stories about his initial employment by the BBC, including his own writings and comments from those close to him following his death, have suggested that his tenure at the BBC was a stormy one. Many of his colleagues with a similarly radical perspective had their career at the corporation foreshortened when they found themselves at odds with the BBC's innate conservatism. Yet Peel not only survived, but prospered. By placing Peel's career firmly within the context of the BBC's cultural and political history, this study contributes original insights on the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic potential of one of the United Kingdom's major social institutions. It is argued in this study that the BBC has been both a hegemonic and counter hegemonic force in the UK.

### **Research Questions and Implications of the Study**

In April 2007 John Peel was posthumously recognized as the "Broadcasters' Broadcaster," a one-time award created to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sony Radio Academy's annual awards ceremony in London. That Peel was chosen by a panel composed of all the on-air broadcasters in Britain as the "most outstanding broadcaster of the last quarter century" (Gibson: 2007) from a list of the 25 top radio personalities in British history was

particularly ironic given that BBC management wanted to dismiss Peel after his first two broadcasts and many times thereafter.

These contradictions suggest a number of research questions that this dissertation seeks to address. Of these, it is his development of a distinctive and enduring radio *persona*, which might be described as that of “an ordinary man in an extraordinary position,” that is perhaps the most relevant for radio scholars.

Research questions pertaining to persona include:

1. How did Peel construct and cultivate his complex persona, which resulted in his dual roles as amateur/professional and fan/gatekeeper?
2. How did he maintain and/or refine this persona through four decades of musical eras in a way that allowed him simultaneously to attract new young fans while maintaining his appeal for older listeners?
3. How did Peel, working for a conservative organization like the BBC, manage to cultivate a global persona as an outsider and maverick who championed marginalized music and performers?

A second set of research questions, which relate to Peel’s role and efficacy as an agent of cultural change, are also central to this investigation. These include:

4. How did Peel revolutionize popular music radio formatting in the United Kingdom while working for a bureaucratic government institution known for its indifference to pop-culture trends?
5. And finally, given the conservative nature of BBC management, how did Peel *keep* his job at Radio One for almost four decades while consistently challenging the status quo?

By addressing these questions, this study hopes not only to contribute insights about Peel, but to shed light on the specific role of persona in the interplay between highly successful DJs and fans and between DJs and the larger music culture that they help shape.



The complexities and contradictions of Peel's on-air persona make him particularly significant. Horton and Wohl's (1956) theories on broadcast persona and parasocial relationships are perhaps best suited to explain why his radio listeners felt as though they knew him personally. However, contrary to Horton and Wohl's understanding of that term, Peel's was an unscripted persona. Also contradictory is the fact that although Peel was widely celebrated for his role as a musical tastemaker, people may have listened to his programs as much for the "bits between the records," as Kershaw (2005) contends, as for the music itself.

Moreover, Peel's program frequently made his listeners uncomfortable, a phenomenon that would appear to defy conventional theories on the use of persona to build audience trust and intimacy. Frith (1978) has observed that listeners generally want to hear familiar music. Listeners generally form their tastes as teenagers and thereafter lose interest in new styles or modes of music. From the beginning of his career in the UK in 1967 until his death in 2004, Peel was forced to confront the reality of his listeners' conservatism. In the brief time he was on Radio London, for example, he received letters from listeners complaining about the American blues he was playing. In the early 1970s his audience was again alienated when he began playing reggae, and so it went throughout his career. People listen to radio to hear the music they have in their personal collections, he once complained, making it clear that he had no intention of staying in one place musically speaking (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 325).

Had Peel simply been a DJ who championed new and unfamiliar music, then, it is unlikely that he would have been able to maintain his position on Radio

One, much less demonstrate throughout his career “a remarkable amount of effective individual agency,” as sociologists Coolidge and Wright (2007: 3) concluded in their study of Peel’s influence. This dissertation argues that Peel’s powerful on-air persona allowed him to develop an unusually strong rapport with his audience. He constructed a persona that drew people to listen to music that was often unfamiliar and sometimes jarring. In doing so, he personified the role of tastemaker and, in the process, exemplified just how difficult it is for radio programmers to play that role.

Although Peel was a British DJ, the relevance of his career and persona development extends beyond cultural and national borders and academic disciplines. The techniques of on-air performance that he honed over the course of his four-decade career, which this study argues are directly responsible for his success, are not culturally specific, but are applicable to any broadcaster whose success depends on creating a bond with listeners. Thus, Peel’s career trajectory and persona have cross-cultural and interdisciplinary relevance (i.e., cultural historians, sociologists, and political scientists). For example, researchers interested in analyzing the on-air personae of influential political and cultural talk-radio hosts should find it of interest.

Analysis of Peel’s persona and influence are a major element of this research, but it is also designed to add to scholarly knowledge of music radio. An important goal of examining Peel’s global prominence as a DJ is to study the commonly accepted view of radio as a *secondary* medium and an impediment to musical innovation. In an article on the programming on Radio One in the 1990’s

Hendy (2000: 743) noted that, “Many analyses of pop music radio... have suggested that radio’s effect is to narrow the range of popular music rather than to nurture new talent or styles, that the process of selecting which records to play—a radio station’s musical ‘gatekeeping’—is ill-serving musical innovation.” Yet Peel’s “gatekeeping” had the opposite effect; he encouraged generations of young musicians by giving them an international forum for their music. Brian Eno, one of the many musicians who benefited from Peel’s patronage early in his career, commented that Peel “qualifies as probably the most important single figure in the British music industry for the last 48 years” (*NME*, November 6, 2004:9). Although such comments are meant to pay homage to a DJ who passed away prematurely, they stand as a profound contradiction of the view that music radio is little more than “aural wallpaper” (Hendy, 2000:169).

One of the assumptions of this study is that characterizing music radio as an intrinsically conservative vehicle fails to account for its potential in promoting both authentic artistic innovation and resistance to the status quo. The view that music radio is a secondary medium to which few people pay close attention is made more problematic by the response of the audience to Peel’s music programs.

## **Dissertation Organization**

An attempt has been made to organize the dissertation in a way that best achieves the major goals of the study, which include an analysis of the evolution of Peel’s on-air persona and discussion of the historical and socio-cultural factors contributing to its development and influence. Each chapter is described briefly below:

Chapter Two provides a review of the theoretical foundations of the research, including an in-depth discussion of the concepts used to analyze Peel's success as a radio personality. This chapter also includes a review of the relevant literature, which ranges from studies on the construction of a broadcast personae and analyses of "broadcast talk" to research studies on popular music, talk radio, and Peel's life and career.

Chapter Three outlines the paradigmatic shifts in popular music in the United Kingdom and in the United States that made Peel's initial success as a broadcaster on American commercial radio possible. Focusing on three key phenomena marking the sixties, The Beatles, "swinging London," and America's obsession with British popular culture in the mid-1960's, it represents the first of four chapters examining Peel's 40-plus years as a broadcaster.

Chapter Four briefly outlines the history of the BBC and the concept of public service broadcasting as defined by John Reith, the founding director general of the BBC. It is designed to help the reader unfamiliar with the culture of the BBC understand why Peel spent much of his career at odds with the administration of this government-funded cultural institution despite the fact that his approach to broadcasting mirrored Reith's philosophy.

Chapter Five investigates Peel's pivotal relationship with Bernie Andrews, his first producer and the man who talked the BBC into hiring and keeping Peel on the air. Despite Peel's deeply held belief in the precepts of public service broadcasting pioneered by Reith, his tenure within the BBC would have ended before it began had it not been for Andrews' intercession. Andrews was the

producer for *Top Gear*, a weekly program that focused on, in the parlance of the BBC, the “sharp” end of popular music. He hired Peel as a presenter for *Top Gear*’s first program, and it was he who supported Peel when many in the administration were adamantly opposed to his continued employment. This chapter is the first of three that address how a rogue “outsider” like Peel managed to create a place for himself within the BBC and how he developed and maintained the persona that helped him establish such a close rapport with several generations of listeners.

Chapter Six looks at Peel’s 20-year relationship with John Walters, the producer who replaced Andrews in the late 1960s. Where Andrews had an innately contentious personality, which put him regularly at odds with the administration, Walters was an articulate advocate who managed to defend Peel’s idiosyncratic programming in the face of continued antipathy on the part of the network’s management and made it possible for Peel to continue his ground-breaking programming into the 1990s.

Chapter Seven analyzes Peel’s apotheosis as a broadcaster in the last decade of his career, when he worked for both Radio One and Radio Four. Radio Four, regarded as the “senior service” within the BBC, serves as a showcase for the work of the nation’s most talented playwrights, authors, poets, and public intellectuals. Peel’s acceptance by Radio Four’s audience, along with his being awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE), illustrate the extent to which Peel, by the end of his life, had managed to transcend formats, generational boundaries, and the BBC itself to become a cultural icon. Although Chignell and Devlin (2006)

suggest that Peel adopted a “different persona” for his Radio Four program, *Home Truths*, this chapter argues that the broadcast persona he had developed on Radio One served him equally well on Radio Four and that his approach on both stations was essentially the same.

Chapter Eight examines the implications of Peel’s career, including a discussion of the example Peel offers of what public service radio can accomplish. Without the pressure of the profit motive, radio can challenge as well as comfort its listeners. This chapter also complicates much of the accepted Romantic mythology surrounding Peel, specifically the notion of the individual actor as a lone “agent of change.” In conclusion it questions the degree to which the success of Peel’s persona was a product of the particular time and place in which he came of age and developed as a radio DJ.

## Chapter 2

### Theoretical Framework, Literature Review, and Method

This chapter discusses several related theoretical concepts used in this study to analyze Peel's broadcast discourse and its role in the development and maintenance of his unique on-air persona. Such analysis not only helps explain his longevity at the BBC and appeal to a diverse audience, but contributes to broader understanding of the roles and strategies used by successful radio personalities. Following a discussion of the theoretical foundation of the study, this chapter reviews the academic studies that guided this research and ends with a discussion of the applicable research methods.

#### Theoretical Framework

To address the research questions outlined in the previous chapter, this study draws on three important theoretical approaches. The first includes Horton and Wohl's (1956) concepts of *persona* and *parasocial relationships* and Goffman's (1981) work on "radio talk." Also important is the work of Brand and Scannell (1991), who were the first to apply Goffman's (1981) analysis of radio announcer language and vocal techniques to the question of how broadcasters develop and maintain their on-air personae. Finally, the study is informed by two additional conceptual works: Guignon's (2004) synthesis of theories of *authenticity* and Loviglio's (2006) analysis of radio discourse *intimacy*. Each is addressed in detail.

## **Persona and Parasocial Relationships**

In a posthumous tribute to Peel, Jarvis Cocker, one of the many musicians who benefited from Peel's support, echoed a sentiment expressed by thousands on the BBC's website. "[P]eople felt they knew him well enough from listening to him on the radio to make judgments about his character, as if he were a friend," he wrote (The Observer; Nov. 4, 2004). Psychologists Horton and Wohl (1956) characterized the phenomenon of listeners feeling that they "know" media personalities as parasocial relationships, a concept directly related to broadcast persona. Writing largely about television at a time when the medium's potential impact was just beginning to be a subject of study, they focused on the novel idea (for the time) that viewers perceive the television characters and announcers who regularly appear in their living rooms in much the same way that they perceive friends and family. As Horton and Wohl wrote, "The most remote and illustrious men are met as if they were in the circle of one's peers; the same is true of a character in a story who comes to life in these media in an especially vivid and arresting way" (215). More specifically, parasocial relationships are formed with a broadcaster when the listener/viewer begins to feel a kinship with the broadcaster's persona that is akin to the feeling they have for family and friends. As Horton and Wohl explained, "To say that he (the broadcaster) is familiar and intimate is to use pale and feeble language for the pervasiveness and closeness with which multitudes feel his presence" (216). Identifying consistency as the essential appeal of a broadcaster's persona, they noted that on-air personalities appear regularly at the same time every day or week and display the same essential characteristics each time. The result is that fans develop a sense of



“history” with the broadcast personality over time. As with any close relationship, fans begin to feel gradually that they “know” on-air personalities and begin to connect with them in what Horton and Wohl describe as an intimate relationship. Even if this “intimacy” amounts to “an imitation and a shadow of what is ordinarily meant by that word,” they wrote, “it is extremely influential with, and satisfying for, the great numbers who willingly receive it and share in it” (216). Although such relationships are one-sided, for fans they are as real as any associations in their lives. As with close friends or lovers, fans begin to feel that they “‘understand’ his character and appreciate his values and motives [sic]” (216-217). Yet another reason that some audience members develop such a close rapport with broadcasters, they theorized, is that on-air personalities represent idealized friends whose behavior is not only always predictable, but never threatens the values and mores audiences have engaged with them in creating. One of the assumptions on which the scholars based their theoretical work is that broadcast personae are scripted by the personnel who manage broadcast talent. As a scripted creation, a broadcaster’s behavior is predictable because it conforms to a prescribed personality that is comforting to the audience.

Horton and Wohl were writing about television broadcasters in the 1950s. In 2008 few broadcaster personae were so scripted, and even those radio announcers who do follow a script can be expected to form and develop a rapport with their audiences over time. For *radio* personalities that rapport, as Crisell (1997) contends, has the potential to be even more profound than for those on television. This, as she explains, is because

companionship is nourished not simply by the blindness of the medium but its secondariness—by the fact that [the radio broadcaster] is often able to accompany [the listener] in many more areas of her existence and for

longer stretches of time than a television presenter could, and to that extent provides a more constant and intimate presence (Crisell 1997: 69).

The successful broadcaster, wrote Horton and Wohl, consciously works to cultivate this “illusion of intimacy.” Dave Garroway, a prominent American radio and television personality in the 1950s and 1960s, described how he “stumbled upon” the means of achieving his own self-constructed persona:

Most talk on the radio in those days was formal and usually a little stiff. But I just rambled along, saying whatever came into my mind. I was introspective. I tried to pretend that I was chatting with a friend over a highball late in the evening.... Then—and later—I consciously tried to talk to the listener as an individual, to make each listener feel that he knew me and I knew him. It seemed to work pretty well then and later. I know that strangers often stop me on the street today, call me Dave and seem to feel that we are old friends who know all about each other (217).

Garroway’s persona was successful because his audience accepted it as a genuine expression of friendship. He seemed surprised that people from his audience would treat him as an “old friend,” and yet he encouraged them to regard him that way.

### **Broadcast Talk**

Expanding Horton and Wohl’s work on persona, Goffman (1971) defined the concept in relation to what he called “radio talk” (1981), which Brand and Scannell (1991) later referred to as “broadcast talk.” The terminology is particularly helpful in analyzing how Peel constructed and maintained his on-air persona throughout his career.

Goffman (1971), a sociologist interested primarily in the use of radio in “identity management,” defined persona as “the public performance of an idealized self.” In his 100-page analysis of radio announcers’ speech patterns, he focused on “what listeners can glean by merely listening closely” (1971). For Goffman, the development a broadcaster’s persona is best understood through study of what listeners hear—the

announcer's language, subtle voice inflections, conversational moves, and other vocal rituals.

Although much of Goffman's broadcast-related analysis was based on the assumption that radio announcers read from scripts, his work is applicable to Peel's (and other broadcasters') extemporaneous speech. The essential problem for any broadcaster, Goffman theorized, is how to frame what is essentially a monologue as a *dialogue*, the illusion of a one-on-one conversation between on-air personality and listener. In his analysis of radio talk, he looked at myriad examples of how radio broadcasters cope with this central problem, and he developed a complex terminology to identify the different ways broadcasters use language and other vocal strategies to compensate for lack of visual or verbal feedback cues. Goffman's terminology is part of the methodology used later to analyze Peel's on-air persona and rhetoric.

In his book *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (1959, 1971), Goffman presented a dramaturgical model of social interaction that offers the metaphor of theatrical performance to explain the "performative" or "staged" dimensions of talk, whether it takes place on the radio or in the public square. By "performance" Goffman meant "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (1971, 235). In terms of this model, a DJ's on-air talk would be viewed as a "performance" constructed by the DJ to create "impressions" on the audience that help construct and maintain his/her persona.

Goffman (1971) attends to what he referred to as "footing," a broadcaster's attitude as expressed through his/her on-air voice and inflections. Footing, in this sense, is used by broadcasters to *position* themselves in relation both to listeners and to their own

utterances. As a component of performance, “footing” is important in the development and maintenance of broadcasters’ on-air personae. According to Goffman, a shift in footing occurs when the “participant’s alignment, or set, or stance, or posture, or projected self is somehow at issue.” To identify the moments at which it occurs, the listener must bear in mind:

1. The projection can be held across a strip of behavior that is less long than a grammatical sentence, or longer, so sentence grammar won’t help us all that much, although it seems clear that a cognitive unit of some kind is involved, minimally, perhaps, a ‘phonemic clause.’ Prosodic (stress or intonation), not syntactic, segments are implied.
2. A continuum must be considered, from gross changes in stance to the most subtle shifts in tone that can be perceived.
3. For speakers, code switching is usually involved, and if not this then at least the sound markers that linguists study; pitch, volume, rhythm, stress, tonal quality.
4. The bracketing of a ‘higher level’ phase or episode of interaction is commonly involved, the new footing having a liminal (marginally perceptible) role, serving as a buffer between two more substantially sustained episodes (Goffman 1981: 128).

Goffman offered innumerable examples of changes in “footing” made by announcers in an attempt to make monologues feel more like dialogues. One series of examples centered on instances when announcers deliberately depart from a script when the script breaks the flow of “conversation”—and thereby the connection—between broadcaster and listener. For example, an announcer talking about “the probability of precipitation” may add “—or the chance of rain, as we say in the street.”

Goffman also addressed broadcaster “self-consciousness,” which occurs when announcers enter into a dialogue with themselves by playing the role of both broadcaster and listener. Self-consciousness may also result when broadcasters feel that something they said implied a lack of “propriety or originality, of sincerity or modesty.” In an effort

to undercut the impact of such remarks, a radio announcer may well “respond to his own words with an ironic phrase of self-dissociation” (286). Yet another form of interjection is what Goffman terms a “counterdisplay,” an announcer’s self-correction (e.g., “Did I say Tuesday? It’s Wednesday I mean, of course...”). The risk, as Goffman notes, is that in attempting to correct a mistake, the announcer may merely compound it by making a second mistake.

“Self-reporting,” a close relative of self-consciousness, is Goffman’s term for the break in the discourse when DJs make reference to their immediate circumstances. It is a kind of peek behind the curtains or momentary digression, *a la* the Wizard of Oz. For Goffman such moments warranted extended analysis because they have “something to teach us about a fundamental feature of all speech, namely the continuous decisions every individual must make regarding what to report of his passing thoughts, feelings and concerns at any moment when he is talking or could talk.” Self-reporting is an integral part of the development of an on-air persona. However, as Goffman warned, a very “narrow line” exists between sufficient and too much self-revelation. Successful broadcasters must develop sensitivity of that “narrow line,” something he suggested very few do with any consistency (296).

Goffman also addressed a set of techniques that broadcasters use to “avoid communicating institutional authority” (Ytreberg 493). A major characteristic of Peel’s persona, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate, was his self-constructed identity as a “rebel” and “outsider” who somehow managed to storm the gates of the BBC, and these set of on-air practices help explain the components of his persona that created that impression.

The first is what Goffman referred to as the “subversion” of scripts—the addition of sarcastic, ironic, or derisive comments. And a second is what he termed “overt collusion” with the audience, which he defined as “an unscripted, frame-breaking editorial comment conveyed *sotto voce* and rendered just before or after the derided strip” (297). The purpose of these two frequently combined techniques is to

allow the announcer to align himself collusively with the audience against a third party: the station management, the source of the copy, individuals or groups mentioned in a news text, indeed, even society at large. . . . The speech markers announcers employ to establish collusive communication with their invisible audience are an integral part of intimate face-to-face talk; their use in broadcasting involves a transplantation” (297-8).

Finally, Goffman (1974/1986, 1981) showed how broadcasters use verbal cues to help audiences distinguish between utterances they make as representatives of an institutional authority and “authoring,” “animating,” and “originating” utterances (Ytreberg 2002: 493). By building a bond between broadcasters and listeners, these oral practices are particularly useful in helping radio personalities build personae that lead listeners to feel, following Horton and Wohl, that they know the broadcaster *better* than most.

Goffman assumed in his analysis of “radio talk” that announcers were required to read their scripts flawlessly and without any detectable personal accentuation (i.e. a news reader). “He is intended to be a perfect speech machine and that alone” (223). He did, however, recognize the distinction between a radio personality and an announcer. He referred to unscripted talk as “fresh talk,” but argued that even what appears to be entirely extemporaneous speech is not entirely original, but is in fact formulaic. As he explained,

When one shifts from copy that is merely elaborated somewhat by extemporaneous remarks, to shows that are fully unscripted, fresh talk would seem to be a reality, not an illusion. But here again it appears that each performer has a limited resource of formulaic remarks out of which

to build a line of patter. A DJ's talk may be heard as unscripted, but it tends to be built up out of a relatively small number of set comments, much as it is said epic oral poetry was recomposed during each delivery (324-25).

Of course, scholars have long contended that oral presentations rely on a formulaic use of language. As Ong (1982) noted,

[I]n *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* Homer was normally taken to be fully accomplished, consummately skilled. Yet it now . . . appear[s] that he had some sort of phrase book in his head. Careful study...showed that he repeated formula after formula. The meaning of the Greek term "rhapsodize" (literally "to stitch song together") became ominous. Homer stitched together prefabricated parts (Ong 1982: 22).

The idea that an apparently extemporaneous oral presentation is in fact formulaic, that it relies on tropes, on repeated phrases and modes of expression, has particular application in the analysis of Peel's broadcast discourse. DJs' monologues rely on set patterns that allow them to enter and exit dialogue in a manner that does not disrupt the flow of the narrative being developed through speech, music, and the other elements of the program.

The observation that on-air personalities stitch together pre-fabricated and extemporaneous elements in no way suggests that less skill is required. This mode of communication has been employed by a long history of oral performers, ranging from the epic poets of Ancient Greece and griots of West Africa to 19<sup>th</sup>-century blues musicians in the Mississippi Delta and hip-hop artists of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. As African-American DJs have demonstrated since the 1940s, oral invention within a formulaic setting is a highly effective means of developing a rapport with listeners, who recognize the codes buried within the discourse and are in many ways complicit in their construction and meaning. As Douglas (1999) notes, "[T]he wordplay that built on slang and folklore assured the listener that (the DJ) could be trusted; he was the genuine article" (237).

Taking Goffman's work on radio announcer language and vocal technique to the next level, Brand and Scannell (1991) applied it to the question of how on-air personalities create and maintain recognizable and familiar radio personae. Like Goffman, they suggested that self-presentations on the radio are much the same as self-presentations in everyday life in that they represent performances that may in different situations be "playful, cynical or sincere. The (ethno)methodological problem considered is not simply the projection of an identity in a single social episode, but the management and maintenance of that identity over a lifetime...through talk" (10). In the construction of a successful radio persona, they concluded, "talk is the routine [and] the routine is the identity" (216).

Through their discourse analysis of DJs on both British and American radio, Brand and Scannell (1991)—and later Douglas (1999)—demonstrated that "broadcast talk" is central to the development and maintenance of the persona. Their work also echoes Horton and Wohl's (1956) contention that broadcasters develop to create an intimate rapport with their listeners.

The possibility of establishing a very close relationship with a radio listener was most prominently demonstrated by Bing Crosby, who revolutionized popular singing by using the microphone to affect a conversational vocal style (a technique that actually originated with Louis Armstrong in the late 1920s). Horton and Wohl (1956), Douglas (1999) and Loviglio (2006) have all made the point that radio enabled that intimate rapport by dissolving the line between public and private discourse. Citing as an example Roosevelt's "fireside chats," Loviglio analyzed how the President reinvented himself as "a real good friend" rather than the distant, untouchable, iconic figure he presented in



personal appearances or on film. The intimacy of radio puts the listener and the speaker on equal terms. The persona presented on the radio is that of a family member or a neighbor; even the President may be perceived as a “real good friend” when he is on the radio in your living room.

### **Authenticity**

The relationship between radio personalities and their audience is not, as Horton and Wohl suggested, very different from any other relationship. Listeners are drawn to the broadcaster’s persona for many of the same reasons they are drawn to a person they might meet in any other social context. Authenticity is the central element in an individual’s credibility, but the values listeners brought to bear in their assessment of the broadcaster’s credibility varied for different generations, as the surveys of the history of American radio by Douglas (1999) and Fisher (2007) make quite clear.

At first glance a broadcaster on a popular music station aimed at a younger audience would appear to face a unique set of challenges. However, as Peel’s popularity with both younger and older audiences suggests, the same basic elements are likely to apply regardless of the age of the audience. Douglas and Fisher profiled a sample of popular DJs of the 1950s and early 1960s, contrasting their often manic mode of presentation with that of the popular DJs of the late 1960s and 1970s, whose relaxed conversational delivery, in turn, contrasts with that of the later so-called “shock jocks” of the late 1970s and 1980s. Guignon’s definition of authenticity, which is discussed in greater detail below and might be summarized as “be true to yourself,” could be applied equally to each of these generations of DJs. And yet they were worlds apart from each other stylistically, and very few DJs have been able to transcend their eras. DJs from each

of the generations the authors researched were perceived as rebels by their audience, as men (generally) who refused to conform to what many in their audience perceived as corrupted mainstream values; but the mode of expressing that rebellion shifted with each generation. That Peel managed to maintain the persona of someone who was out of step with the mainstream for four decades raises interesting questions about the elements of his persona that appear to have transcended generations and eras.

Fisher and Douglas' characterization of listening to the radio as a "primal experience" (Douglas 1999: 5) underscores the essential intimacy of the medium, an intimacy that Peel used to his advantage throughout his career. Douglas' memories, echoed by Fisher, of listening to the radio late at night remain vivid in her memory. Listeners across the country, across generations, "had a deeply private bond with radio," she wrote (5). That connection was forged by the voice on the radio, the projected persona that drew listeners into a rich imaginary world of their mutual creation. They trusted the voice on the radio because "he was a friend, a confidante, a counselor" (Horton and Wohl 1956: 217). They were drawn to the voice of many of the successful DJs of the 1950s and 1960s, as later audiences were drawn to DJs in the late 1970s and 1980s, because they represented something deeply appealing to young men, particularly, who "were...urged to be aggressive, distinctive individuals yet urged to obey authority figures and behave themselves" (Douglas 1999: 241). DJs represented rebellion, but they also represented the kind of authenticity that had long been celebrated by the Romantic ideal of the child within.

Ever since the time of Rousseau, the inner/outer dichotomy has been interpreted in terms of the distinction between the child and the adult. What is characteristic of the inner self is that it is childlike, spontaneous,

in touch with its own true feelings, and capable of an intuitive understanding of what things are all about. In contrast to the child, the adult self is perceived as hardened and artificial. (Guignon 2004: 83).

As Douglas (1999) has suggested, DJs were boys who didn't have to grow up, boys who were free to flaunt the rules that harnessed everybody else and remain in that blissfully brief period of adolescence when they were free of adult responsibilities. It is true of some aspects of Peel's persona, but it is confounded by others.

In his analysis of theories of authenticity and the ways in which it has been defined since Rousseau, Guignon (2004) suggests that "having a different perspective on things seems to be a criterion of authenticity, for how can one be authentic if one is totally aligned with the herd?" (2004: 76). That is the essence of the Romantic ideal as embodied in Rousseau's philosophy. The Romantics believed that as children we are pure, spontaneous and joyful, but as we grow into adulthood we begin to assume an outer shell, a persona, to protect the innocence of the child within. Freud, writes Guignon, dispelled that notion suggesting we all carry within us "a mixed bag of capacities and drives, some of them kind and loving, others dark and cruel" (Guignon 2004: 103). Guignon concludes his analysis by suggesting, as he did at the beginning of his study, that Heidegger's concept of "releasement" is the essence of an authentic persona; as articulated by Guignon, Heidegger's theory contends that authenticity involves subjugation of the individual ego.

Becoming authentic, as it is commonly understood, involves centering in on your own inner self, getting in touch with your feelings, desires and beliefs, and expressing those feelings, desires and beliefs in all you do....The emphasis is entirely on owning and owning up to what you are at the deepest level ....[but] it is clear that being authentic is not just a matter of concentrating on one's self, but also involves deliberation about

how one's commitments make a contribution to the good of the public world in which one is a participant" (Guignon 2004: 162).

Authenticity is central to the broadcaster's credibility. As Guignon's definition suggests, broadcasters who are only interested in promoting themselves will find that the audience will soon lose interest. John Peel understood that successful radio broadcasters are audience centered in their discourse and in their mode of speech. The language broadcasters use, the tone of their voice and the inflections they employ are all perceived by the listener as being indicative of the authenticity of the broadcaster's persona (Goffman 1981; Brand and Scannell 1991; Crisell 1997; Douglas 1999).

## **Literature Review**

This study also draws on multiple strands of biographical, historical and sociological research, each of which is necessary in discussing and understanding radio in the United Kingdom, Peel's success as a broadcaster, and his impact on music formatting and the practice of music radio in Great Britain. Research related to rhetorical analyses of broadcast speech serves as the foundation for analysis of Peel's construction of an on-air persona on both talk and British music radio. Equally important in contextualizing this study is the literature on the long history of the BBC, shifts in its relationship with its audience, and its periodic re-evaluation of its role as a publicly funded, public-service broadcaster. Although Peel spent most of his career with the BBC, his first broadcasting experience was in the United States in the 1960s. Recent scholarship on that period of his life was consulted in an attempt to flesh out his own account of his time in the United States. The two published biographical studies of his life were consulted, as was his own

autobiography which was completed by his wife, Sheila, after his death. Literature on radio and the popular music culture of the 1960s helps to explain Peel's otherwise improbable success in finding work, while still a neophyte broadcaster, with two of the most successful stations in the country at the time. Finally, studies covering the historical development of radio and of the work of other British DJs help to place Peel's accomplishments within the context of what others have contributed to the medium.

### **Broadcast Talk and Persona**

The BBC recognized the need for a different approach in the late 1920s, but it took the company a long time to learn how to do it (Scannell & Cardiff, 1991:153-78). Hilda Matheson was the first Head of Talks in the BBC; she tried a number of different approaches which led her to the realization that it was "useless to address the microphone as if it were a public meeting, or even to read it essays or leading articles. The person sitting at the other end expected the speaker to address him personally, simply, almost familiarly, as man to man" (Matheson, 1933:75-6, quoted in Scannell, 3).

Clearly the first thing broadcasters, as exemplified by Matheson, had to learn was that they were not talking *to* the microphone, an inanimate studio instrument, but *through* it to an unseen listener sitting at home who expected the person on the radio to talk to them as they would if they were in the room together. Broadcasting, as the term implies was originally envisioned as a way to reach a larger mass audience than had been previously possible. The radio transmitter sends a speaker's voice to many points at once, but while it reaches a *mass* audience it does so in a very different way than when it is carried through a public address system into a hall or other public space where people have gathered to hear the speaker. Professional speakers were used to public oratory, but

many found the transition from the arena to the radio studio a challenge. While performers and speakers in a church, at a political rally, or in a concert hall can reasonably expect the audience to pay attention to them, the broadcaster cannot make that assumption. “The burden of responsibility is thus on the broadcaster to understand the conditions of reception and to express that understanding in language intended to be recognized as oriented to those conditions” (Scannell, 3).

It was some time, however, before the BBC embraced the idea of the broadcast voice as one representative of the majority of the listeners. John Reith, the BBC’s first controller, and the man who was the effective architect of the BBC’s programming and its approach to broadcasting until the end of the 1950s, outlined his ideals for broadcasters on the BBC in 1924:

It is certainly true that even the commonest and simplest of words are subjected to horrible and grotesque abuse. One hears the most appalling travesties of vowel pronunciation. This is a matter in which broadcasting may be of immense assistance....We have made a special effort to secure in our various stations men who, in the presentation of program items, the reading of news bulletins and so on, can be relied upon to employ the correct pronunciation of the English tongue....No one would deny the great advantage of standard pronunciation of the language, not only in theory but in practice. Our responsibilities in this matter are obvious, since in talking to so vast a multitude, mistakes are likely to be promulgated to a much greater extent than was ever possible before (Reith 1924: 161).

Reith’s remarks are freighted with the assumption common within the middle class in the period between the 1920’s when the BBC went on the air and the late 1950s when such classist assumptions were largely, slowly abandoned. “It was Reith’s ambition to establish through broadcasting a distinct national identity beyond class and regionality” (Shingler & Wieringa 1998: 45).

Interestingly, Hilda Matheson, the first person to head up the BBC's Talks Department, didn't share Reith's assumptions. She assumed the post in 1927, but she resigned five years later. The following year she published her ideals for the BBC broadcaster. She wrote:

There is no single pattern of Standard English that can be defined with complete phonetic exactitude....The nearest approach to a definition which would be at all widely accepted is that Standard English—in the academic sense—is roughly the educated speech of southern England (Matheson 1933: 66).

The notion that everyone living outside of southern England should be expected to adopt Standard English as their mode of speech was anathema not only to Matheson, but, she noted, to many people across the country who “regard southern English as a backboneless, affected and mincing form of speech....The BBC,” she added, “has been accused of popularizing an effete, affected form of speech [and] ‘Announcers’ English’ is in some quarters a term of disparagement (Matheson 1933: 67).

Nearly fifty years later, a comment by Elwyn Evans, a head of the BBC's radio training section, suggested that Hilda Matheson's approach had by then become a commonplace of the BBC's expectations of its announcers, presenters and producers:

It has been proved over and over again that the most effective speaker is the personal speaker. He may be reading a script but he *sounds* as though he is talking to me alone. My conscious mind may be aware that he isn't doing anything of the sort—but, as in the theatre, it's the subconscious impression that counts. If a radio speaker, thanks to the way his script is written, makes me *feel* he's talking to me personally, it becomes harder to switch him off (Evans 1977: 15).

As discussed earlier, Goffman's (1981) work on “the phenomenon of socially situated language use” is critical to this analysis of Peel's on-air performance. Goffman's work has not only been applied to a broad range of mass media research, but has been

instrumental in the development of major mass media theories (See, e.g., Gitlin, 1980; Meyrowitz, 1985; Dayan and Katz, 1994; Thompson, 1995; Ytreberg, 2002). Although, as Ytreberg (2002) observed, “interpersonal interaction is the enduring main concern through all of Goffman’s work” (484), focus on “how interpersonal and mass-mediated interaction relate to each other” has been a significant source of inspiration for media studies scholars generally and broadcast scholars, in particular (488).

Echoing Goffman (1981), Crisell (1994) suggests that much of the speech heard on radio is scripted, but it is written to disguise that fact. Writers work diligently to include the kind of language that implies what Goffman (1981) refers to as “fresh talk” (i.e. extemporaneous speech). Crisell argues this is necessary because scripted speech serves to emphasize the distance between the presenter and the listener.

Ideally “radio talk” should approximate as much as possible the rhythms and vocabulary of everyday conversation. Hutchby (1991) defined the two modes of speech on the radio as “mundane” and “institutional.” In Hutchby’s formulation “mundane talk is designed, interactively, explicitly for co-participants and is differentiated from institutional talk by the fact that the latter is designed, and displays itself, as being designed, explicitly for overhearers” (Hutchby 1991:119).

Taking Hutchby’s conception of “intermediate” talk—that is talk that approximates the character of mundane speech but since it is broadcast into a public domain it exhibits features of institutional talk—Shingler and Wieringa (1998) argue that while Hutchby suggested that intermediate speech is most in evidence on talk radio stations, in fact almost all radio speech could be characterized as intermediate.



In describing radio speech as intermediate, we can acknowledge the fact that, however mundane radio speech sounds, it is invariably self-conscious, performative and designed to be heard (publicly), offering few, if any, opportunities for listeners to participate in the communicative act (:35).

Crisell (1997: 67) has suggested that there are two styles of presentation on music radio, one he calls “referential” where the focus is on the music with a minimum of personality; the other he refers to as “emotive” which is the mode of presentation employed by “personality DJs who feel free to talk about their life, what they read in the paper that day etc.” In terms of the BBC’s Radio One that is essentially the difference in the style of the presentation during the day, and that of John Peel and others who followed his example in the evening and late at night. As Crisell explains:

The ‘emotive’ presenter is therefore likely to host prime-time shows, whereas presenters with a more ‘referential’ approach tend to occupy the margins of the broadcast schedule, playing new releases or less well-known, more specialist music in shows at ‘unsocial’ hours of the night or weekend” (Crisell 1997: 67).

The primary difference between DJs and their more formal counterparts, as Goffman et al noted earlier, is their style of address. But Montgomery (1986) points out that the DJ’s informal use of the first and second pronouns obscures a more complex reality in terms of who exactly is being addressed:

[U]nlike the newsreader’s or narrator’s characteristic use of the third person, the music presenter establishes a direct relationship with the listener by focusing on the axis of the first and second persons ‘I’ and ‘you.’ Nevertheless since his listeners are numerous the field of reference of ‘you’ is constantly shifting from individuals who are identified by name, region, occupation or whatever to the whole indeterminate audience; but no element of the latter is ever really excluded and often two audiences are being simultaneously addressed (1986: 424-427).

The audience is addressed simultaneously as a collective mass but also as an individual in recognition of the fact that people are often alone when listening to the radio.

The intimacy that is achieved between the listener and the broadcaster is accomplished through the use of personal pronouns as well as “the manner of delivery, the tone and pitch of the presenter’s voice (Crisell 1997: 68); but, as Montgomery (1986: 429) suggested, it can also be created through what he called ‘response-demanding’ utterances such as ‘How are you today?’- a question which again addresses the mass audience as an individual. That sense of intimacy is further cemented by what Crisell (1997) refers to as radio’s “secondariness,” its portability which enables the listener to take the broadcaster with her creating the illusion of a constant companion.

Finally Scannell and Brand (1991) looked at the DJ’s broadcast talk in terms of not only the development of a unique persona, but the maintenance of a distinctive persona on a daily radio program. Noting that “Certain kinds of careers are histrionic,” Scannell suggests that

[T]eachers, preachers, politicians and DJs make a living that is, to a greater or lesser extent, dependent on performing in public. This may involve the projection of a carefully crafted public identity and the maintenance of that identity in and through time (Brand and Scannell 1991: 203).

Brand and Scannell contended that successful programs and programmers have an established identity constructed through repetition, both in terms of program content and scheduling. “Routine,” wrote Giddens (1984), “is integral both to the continuity of the personality of the agent, as he or she moves along the paths of daily activities, and to the institutions of society, which are such only through their continued reproduction” (quoted in Brand and Scannell 1991: 205).

Despite the often noted unpredictability of Peel’s programming, the very “unpredictability” of his programs served to seal the identity of the program and the host.

The program operated within boundaries; they may have been idiosyncratic, they may not have been immediately apparent to a casual listener, but to his regular listeners they were as comfortable as the more tightly regulated mix of talk and music on the more mainstream daytime programs (Garner 2007).

### **Peel in America**

Douglas (1999) notes in the introduction to *Listening In* that it is the only chronicle of the nearly 100-year history of radio in America. The only other writer to attempt a comprehensive history of broadcasting in the United States, Erik Barnouw, completed it in four volumes, the last of which was published in 1970. As Douglas freely concedes hers is far from a comprehensive study, but it is the first and only in depth, scholarly study thus far of radio in America from the point of view of the listener. As such it is an attempt to piece together a picture of an aural medium of which precious little recorded evidence remains, but which lives vividly within the memories of generations of listeners. She begins by analyzing why so many people are nostalgic for the radio of their youth.

Douglas makes three relevant points in expanding the notion of radio's aural appeal. The first is an expansion of the notion that radio stimulates the listeners' imaginations such that they create visual images based on what they hear (i.e. the presenter's appearance; 'pictures' inspired by the music, etc.). She suggests that listeners develop a deep emotional attachment to the medium, and when they express nostalgia for radio it is not only a longing for what they heard, but for the way they heard it. "The more we work on making our own images, the more powerfully attached we become to them, arising as they do from deep within us (1999:26).

She makes a case for the comfort of familiar music before turning to the power of orality. Listening is an innately sociable experience in a way that watching is not.

“Listening is centripetal,” writes Douglas, “it pulls you into the world. Looking is centrifugal; it separates you from the world” (30). Looking, Douglas argues, allows us to remain separated from our surroundings, it allows us to analyze and dissect from a distance; conversely, sound, “envelopes us, pouring into us, whether we want it to or not, including us, involving us” (1999: 30). Listening to someone else is inherently more sociable than reading about or watching them, but the essence of sociability is listening *together* albeit as individuals.

Orality generates a powerful participatory mystique. Because the act of listening simultaneously to spoken words forms hearers into a group (while reading turns people in on themselves), orality fosters a strong collective sensibility. People listening to a common voice, or to the same music, act and react at the same time. They become an aggregate entity—an audience—and whether or not they all agree with or like what they hear, they are unified around that common experience” (Douglas 1999: 29).

Fisher’s (2007) study of radio DJs in America from the late 1940s until the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is also told from the point of view of the listener. Along with Douglas (1999) it was helpful in placing Peel’s radio practices in the context of his peers in the US. During the time Peel lived in America he became a fan of Wolfman Jack’s radio programs from the border radio station, XERB (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 192). In an interview late in his life he described his initial on-air persona as “a kind of introverted British Wolfman Jack” (Lafreniere:2003). He was clearly influenced by the presentation styles of some of the DJs he heard during his time in the United States, and the idea for his program, *The Perfumed Garden*, was conceived while he was living in California.

Writing about the music and the announcers on the FM stations that programmed rock music in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Douglas notes:

The pace was slow and subdued, and the DJ spoke into the mike as if he were chatting with you in bed. It was very important to sound ‘mellow.’ More to the point, many sounded—and were—stoned....As Cousin Brucie, a successful AM radio DJ in the 1960s, put it, “[W]here the most successful jocks on AM sounded like they’d love a piece of your bubblegum, the rising stars of FM sounded like they knew where you kept your stash of pot (Douglas 1999: 271).

Peel worked for four AM stations with a Top 40 format, but there is little information available on this period. His autobiography offers only sketchy details, but Rothenbuhler (2006), an expert on the history of American radio, did fill in some of the gaps in Peel’s account of his early career.

### **Pirate Radio**

The last part of Peel’s career before he joined the BBC is covered in Chapman’s (1992) in-depth scholarly study of Radio Caroline and Radio London, the two most popular pirate stations that broadcast from ships anchored in the North Sea, three miles off the south east coast of England outside British territorial waters. It is in part a study in contrasts. Chapman’s study is tellingly titled *Selling the Sixties: The Pirates and Pop Music Radio*.

The final chapters cover John Peel’s short-lived, but “legendary” program for Radio London, *The Perfumed Garden*; and the first weeks of Radio One, told largely from the point of view of the ex-pirate DJs who were hired by the BBC and a listener (Chapman) who found it to be a poor substitute for the unbridled pirates.

Other histories of the pirate stations include Stewart’s (2005) *Out of the Stewpot: My Autobiography*, Skues’ (1994) *Pop Went the Pirates* and Henry and Von Joel’s (1984)

*Pirate Radio: Then and Now* were all written for people who remember the stations.

Stewart and Skues tell the story largely of Radio London from their point of view as a DJ on the ship, while Henry and Von Joel rely on interviews with many of the DJs, including Peel.

## **BBC Radio**

A review of the literature pertaining to the history of the BBC offers insights into the development of the corporation and its culture. This is necessary to understand Peel's reception within the BBC early in his career, but it is also germane to an understanding of his lengthy tenure. As a public service broadcast organization the BBC operates on an entirely different set of assumptions and imperatives than a commercial broadcaster.

Peel was a broadcaster very much in the mold of the corporation's founding director, John Reith. Reith had a profound influence on BBC culture and radio programming during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and his conception of the role and practice of public service broadcasting remain ingrained in the BBC's mission. Briggs' five-volume survey of the first 50 years of broadcasting in the United Kingdom is largely a history of the BBC. However, it also addresses the pre-BBC era, as well as the period beginning in the mid 1950s when the BBC faced competition from commercial broadcasters, first on television and later on radio.

The first volume addresses the arguments for and against non-commercial broadcasting in the United Kingdom, arguments still advanced periodically by commercial broadcasters who resent what they see as the BBC's unfair advantage as a publicly funded organization. The second volume covers the years between 1927, when the BBC was established as a non-profit corporation, and 1939 when the Second World

War broke out. During this period the BBC's single radio network had a hegemonic grip on radio programming in the United Kingdom. That grip was relaxed during the war, the period covered in the third volume, when it added a second network to carry programming to the British troops overseas. The fourth volume looks at the period between the end of the war, when BBC radio was divided into three separate networks, and the mid 1950s when television was introduced in the United Kingdom, and the BBC faced domestic commercial competition for the first time. The final volume in the series chronicles the sweeping social and political changes of the 1960s and 1970s. The BBC's dominance over radio programming was challenged for the first time, resulting in the addition of a fourth network in 1967. This comprehensive study is invaluable to an understanding of the BBC and the culture that created and sustained it.

Street's (2002) brief histories of the BBC, and of British broadcasting (2006), are also useful studies of radio in the United Kingdom; the history offers an overview of the chronological development of broadcasting and the personalities involved, while the dictionary arranges the information in a format that is useful for checking on a specific topic. Closer to the focus of this dissertation is Garfield's (1998) study of the turbulent period when Matthew Bannister took over from Johnny Beerling as controller of Radio One in the mid 1990s. Garfield, a journalist, spent a year observing many of the personalities working for Radio One, and documenting their reactions to the sweeping programming and personnel changes Bannister introduced. Hendy (2000) also looked at the changes in the programming on Radio One and the impact of a national music radio network incorporating previously marginalized style of music within its mainstream daytime programming.

## John Peel

Within weeks of Peel's death in October, 2004, two biographies, Wall's *John Peel: A Tribute* and Heatley's *John Peel: A Life in Music*, had been published. Wall is a music journalist in the United Kingdom; his book is largely a collection of his impressions of Peel based on brief encounters, his memories of listening to Peel on the radio when he was a teenager, and reflections on the later years of Peel's life and his reaction and that of his many fans to his death. It reveals as much about Wall as it does about Peel. That the book's first run had to be withdrawn because of a libelous passage confirms the impression that this book was hastily written and poorly researched. Heatley's book is a concise overview of Peel's life and career, but it too suffers from hasty writing. It is essentially a synopsis of material either written either by Peel, or by journalists who had interviewed him.

Before he died, Peel had only completed 40,000 words of his autobiography—about a third of the finally published manuscript. The book was finished by his wife Sheila with the help of a ghostwriter, Ryan Gilbey. As a tribute to Peel from his family, the book provides an account of their life together. The section Peel wrote is filled with his memories of his early life, the time he spent as a conscript in the Army, and the first couple of years he spent in the United States. It does not cover his radio career from his point of view at all, making it far from a definitive study. Thus, along with its other contributions, this dissertation adds to the very modest scholarly literature on his career and achievements as a broadcaster.



The most comprehensive study of his work at the BBC is Garner's (1993/2007), an in-depth look at the 4,400 sessions recorded for his program between September 1967 and October 2004. Garner documented every session recorded for the BBC in the original version of the book published in 1993; in the later book the focus is entirely on the sessions produced for Peel's programs. As a record of the breadth and depth of the music presented on the program it is invaluable.

The only study that attempts to address Peel's impact on music radio in the United Kingdom is an (unpublished) paper by Coolidge and Wright (2007) that explores the sociological "puzzle" of Peel's impact on music culture—an impact that they describe as "a truly rare instance of one man making a huge difference" (3). Frustrated by the inadequacy of sociological theorists (e.g. Bourdieu, Giddens, Weber, and Becker) to explain Peel's individual agency and influence, they conclude that although "Peel was indeed something special...our tools as sociologists seem to us ill equipped to deal with that specialness" (18). Although their thesis remains incomplete and they offer no real analysis, their argument that Peel provides "a wonderful case study in understanding the relationship between agency and structure, clarifying the conditions under which an individual person does make a difference" (5) underscores the relevance of this study.

Academic studies that have focused specifically on Peel's presentation style are few and limited. In 2006, *The Radio Journal* published Chignell and Devlin's brief look at Peel's persona and discourse on *Home Truths*, the program he created for Radio Four, and an essay by Tessler, who argued that Peel "deliberately cultivated" a Liverpudlian accent close to that of the Beatles. Although these studies offer interesting details and perspectives, they are narrow in scope. Neither, for example, presents a comprehensive

analysis of Peel's persona across his 40-year career; nor do they address the larger contexts of popular music history and BBC organizational culture, as this study does. This dissertation research will be the first to compare and contrast Peel's presentation style in terms of the construction and maintenance of his broadcast persona as a DJ on Radio One and as a talk show host on Radio Four.

## **Methodology**

This case study uses an integrative approach that draws on rhetorical analysis, Goffman's (1974, 1981) model of broadcast-talk, and historical research methods to investigate the impact of Peel's radio career and persona over the 40-year period between the mid-1960s and 2004. Along with a list of research questions, this section presents information on the research design and methods guiding the analysis.

As noted, the research questions fall into two general categories: (1) those pertaining to Peel's career trajectory and longevity at the BBC; and (2) those related to his remarkably consistent on-air persona, which drew listeners to his music radio programs from every generation, age, and socio-economic group over the course of four decades. Specific questions include:

1. How did Peel construct and cultivate his complex persona, which resulted in his dual roles as amateur/professional and fan/gatekeeper?
2. How did Peel maintain and/or refine this persona through four decades of musical eras in a way that allowed him simultaneously to attract new young fans while maintaining his appeal for older listeners?

3. How did Peel, working for a conservative organization like the BBC, manage to cultivate a global persona as an outsider and maverick who championed marginalized music and performers?
4. How did Peel revolutionize popular music radio formatting in the United Kingdom while working for a bureaucratic government institution known for its indifference to pop-culture trends?
5. How did Peel, given the conservative nature of BBC management, how did Peel *keep* his job at Radio One for almost four decades while consistently challenging the status quo?

## **Research Design**

The purpose of analyzing Peel's on-air performance over the course of four decades on two different networks with two distinctly different audiences is to produce insights about the construction and management of his distinctive persona. This section provides an overview of the theoretical basis for the analytical techniques used in the study, followed by an example of how the analysis is applied to Peel's on-air talk to provide insights about the development and maintenance of his broadcast persona.

The underlying assumption of this study's research design is that by integrating contemporary rhetorical analysis of Peel's radio talk with Goffman's social-interaction model, conclusions may be made as to how Peel fostered a perception of himself as an

authentic on-air presence whose rapport and sense of intimacy with listeners encouraged parasocial relationships (Horton and Wohl, 1956). This integrative approach allows for a more comprehensive analysis of Peel's language, subtle voice inflections, and other modes of address—including Goffman's (1974, 1981) "footing," "self-reporting," "counterdisplay," self-correcting," "subversion," and "overt collusion"—than would be possible through the use of rhetorical analysis or Goffman's broadcast-talk model alone. The case study method allows the use of multiple research methodologies (see Brewer and Hunter, 1989, and Stake, 1995).

The rhetorical analysis component of the study is predicated on the assumption that language shapes perception, recognition, interpretation, and response (Campbell 2006). According to the rhetorical theorist Walter Ong, "Human communication is never one-way. Always, it not only calls for response, but is shaped in its very form and content by anticipated response" (Ong 1982:176). As he stressed, the interruptive role of a "medium" must be overcome:

To formulate anything I must have another person or other persons already 'in mind' ....This is the paradox of human communication. Communication is intersubjective. The media model is not. There is no adequate model in the physical universe for this operation of consciousness, which is distinctively human and which signals the capacity of human beings to form true communities wherein person shares with person interiorly, intersubjectively (Ong 1982: 176).

As this brief discussion of rhetorical theory makes clear, the basic elements of rhetorical analysis are highly congruent with Goffman's (1974,1981, 1982) model of "radio talk." The challenge for broadcasters, as both Ong (1982) and Goffman (1982) observed, is to make listeners feel included in an essentially one-directional mode of discourse. Broadcasters cannot elicit an immediate response, but in order to communicate

effectively with their listeners, as Ong has suggested, they must have some sense of the response.

For this study, then, Peel's discourse was examined in terms of both Goffman's modes of address *and* contemporary rhetorical theory, two approaches that are not only congruent, but are complementary and often overlapping. One way to conceptualize the difference between these two methods is that while rhetorical analysis is designed to capture broad areas of speech such as persuasive argument and ideological stance, Goffman's analytical framework is aimed more at the microcosm, making it considerably more detailed and specific. In addition to Goffman's modes of address, the following elements of rhetorical analysis were used in this study to investigate Peel's broadcast talk: (1) rhetorical situation (context); (2) speaker; (3) intended (or imagined) audience; (4) text (arguments, claims, organization, and evidence); (5) style (choice of words, figurative language, sentence structure, and innate rhythms of speech); and (6) ideology (political stance and motivation).

Recordings of Peel's programs broadcast on Radio London and the BBC networks Radio One and Radio Four, representing each of the four decades of his career, were downloaded and his broadcast talk transcribed to facilitate the analysis. Close listening was also essential to the analysis because, as Goffman (1982) observed, a radio announcer will use his voice the way an actor will use his eyes and body to support or contradict the meaning of the words. One of the challenges in translating the nuances of the spoken word to the printed page is the difficulty of transcribing the tone of voice. Goffman (1982) coined the term "footing" as a means of documenting the shifts in a broadcaster's tone of voice and change in attitude.

However, while Goffman's terminology and his insights were used in this study's analysis, the primary focus is to show how Peel used language to articulate and define his persona. In this regard, he is much like any other DJ. Yet his idiosyncratic approach to the art of the DJ, along with his love of language, clearly distinguishes analysis of his discourse from that of Montgomery (1986) or Brand and Scannell (1991), whose results were limited by the scripted, mundane discourse of their subjects. Peel is a more complex personality whose on-air rhetoric was informed by his singularly English eccentricities and passions and expressed in relatively brief interludes between records on Radio One and on longer segments on Radio Four's *Home Truths*. Therefore, while the many modes of address identified by Goffman and Montgomery (e.g., frequent use of the second-person pronoun, direct address and questions, change of tone and internal dialog) are applicable in this analysis, the primary goal is to capture the individuality of Peel's approach through his singular use of the language.

The following example is offered to provide a brief demonstration of how this study's integrative methodological approach was carried out. In this excerpt from one of Peel's broadcasts, he talks about a record that he particularly liked that he had just received from a band from South Africa. In his several failed attempts to pronounce the title of the album, he exemplifies a number of the rhetorical maneuvers or strategies outlined by Goffman (1981):

That's A.C. Temple, and this thing here that I'm banging (accompanied by the noise of his banging on what sounds like a tin can) is something that I've been looking forward to for a very long time indeed. It's the new LP from The Bhundu Boys. 'More Real Shed Sounds from Zimbabwe,' it says, and the LP is called [chuckles] no...[stumbles over the pronunciation...tries a second time...] no, no —I tell you what. By tomorrow night I will work out exactly how I should say it, and we'll play

a track from it. It's translated as "Sticks of Fire," and I'm tempted to change the whole of tonight's program and put in four or five tracks, but you see I'm too old for that sort of thing, that sort of irresponsible behavior. But here is another record that was sent to me from Zimbabwe by Julian Walker, who is teaching out there. It's from The Marxist Brothers, and I'm sure Andy's played stuff by The Marxist Brothers. He may even have played this track.

This excerpt demonstrates a mode of address that Goffman called "the remedial process," a term he used to refer to the ways in which broadcasters attempt to cover their mistakes by overstating them and/or making a joke or parody of the situation. As Goffman (1981) explained:

Now consider the convenience that can be made of the remedial process. Take a speaker who must utter a foreign word.... A standard recourse is to break frame and gild the pronunciation, either by affecting an uneducated hyper-Anglicization, or by an articulation flourish that mimics a fully authentic version—in either case providing a response that isn't merely remedial and can't quite be seen simply as corrective social control. Here the danger of making a mistake is not merely avoided, it is 'worked,' exploited, turned to advantage in the apparent cause of fun (221)

In the case of Peel, the "fun" is often at his own expense, as when in the example above, he makes fun of his inability to pronounce a name or title in a language other than English. Like many native English speakers in the United Kingdom, he is reasonably comfortable with European languages, but often ill at ease and much less confident when dealing with African and Asian names and titles.

### **Data Sources and Samples**

Two research methods were used for the data-collection portion of this study. The first of these, oral history, was relied on for background and insights from some of the people still living who worked with Peel during his long career with the BBC. Telephone interviews were conducted with Clive Selwood, Bernie Andrews, Chris Lycett, Johnny

Beerling, Annie Nightingale, Harry Parker and Louise Kattenhorn, all of whom contributed significantly to this study's insights on Peel's work habits, the construction and maintenance of his on-air persona, his relationship with the management of the BBC during his long tenure there, and anecdotal details about his personality, family life, and connection to listeners. This primary source data was collected over the course of seven months in 2007, recorded on analog tapes, and transcribed to insure accuracy.

Secondly, historical methods of archival research were used to reveal how Peel developed his public persona. Primary sources, including essays and other writings published in *International Times*, *Sounds*, *The Observer*, *The Guardian*, *The Listener*, and *The Radio Times*, were analyzed as exemplars of how he managed his persona over the four decades covered in this study. Some of these publications are only available at the British Library in London, and others were downloaded from the Internet. Hundreds of recordings of Peel's radio programs broadcast on the BBC's Radio One and Radio Four between 1967 and 2004 were also downloaded from the Internet and listened to for this study. Of these 27 were transcribed for close rhetorical analysis. In addition, Peel's Radio London broadcasts were also analyzed. This data documents the shifts in his persona during his career.

Secondary sources such as the BBC's website, and Internet sites constructed by Peel's fans revealed his listeners' reactions to and perceptions of his persona over time. Internet sites with recordings of his programs for both Radio London and Radio One were indispensable to this study because no official recordings of his programs were ever made. Without the recordings of his programs for Radio Four that have been archived on



the BBC's website, the analysis comparing and contrasting his persona on Radio One with that on Radio Four would not have been possible.

## CHAPTER 3

### A Rogue's Progress: Peel and the Swinging Sixties

This chapter, which provides a brief overview of popular culture in the United States and the United Kingdom in the early and mid-1960s, establishes the historical and cultural contexts in which Peel constructed his unique on-air persona. The 1960s were, of course, an era of sweeping changes in both British and American popular culture that proved crucial in shaping Peel's career. Focusing on three key phenomena marking the period between 1964 and 1967—The Beatles, “swinging London,” and America's intoxication with British pop music—it examines the first few years of Peel's broadcasting career in America, a career made possible by the paradigmatic shift in popular music taste and the sudden but pervasive interest in British popular culture. After discussing Peel's career in the United States and briefly covering the phenomenon of “swinging” London, this chapter also focuses on Peel's first radio program in the UK, *The Perfumed Garden*, on Radio London in 1967. Drawing on the work of Goffman, this section provides the dissertation's first analysis of his radio discourse in terms of the initial development of his on-air persona.

#### Introduction

British popular music had relatively little impact in the United States before the arrival of The Beatles in 1964. In fact, in 1963 not one British act made number one on the *Billboard* pop chart. That changed dramatically the following year when of the 23 songs that reached number one on the *Billboard* pop chart, nine were by British bands,

with six of the nine by The Beatles (Whitburn 1997). Almost literally overnight the British gained unprecedented fashionable cachet in America, and anyone who had even the most tangential connection with The Beatles was very much in demand (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005). Solely because he happened to have been born in Liverpool in 1940, John Ravenscroft (who did not adopt his on-air name, John Peel<sup>i</sup>, until his return to the UK in 1967) was suddenly in a position to gain the on-air experience that would prove invaluable to him when he returned to the UK.

Ravenscroft worked for two of the most successful Top 40 radio stations (KLIF in Dallas, and KOMA in Oklahoma City) in the country in the mid-1960s. As Rothenbuhler (2006) has suggested, had it not been for the tidal wave of British popular music that swept across America in the wake of The Beatles, it is unlikely that a completely inexperienced British DJ would have had any chance of securing a position on the air at either of those stations. But The Beatles changed everything. For the three years following their arrival in America in February 1964, British popular culture, exemplified by “swinging London,” was the height of fashion.

The impact of The Beatles and rock and roll on both sides of the Atlantic was due, at least in part, to the unprecedented number of teenagers in both the United States and the U.K. in the 1960s and their equally unprecedented affluence (Sandbrook 2006). At the beginning of the decade, nearly a third of the population in the UK (16,031,000) was under 20 years of age, with half of this group between 10 and 19 years old (Census Bureau, United Kingdom 1964). In the United States, nearly 20 percent of the population was in the same age group (United States Census Bureau, 1964). As a result a new “youth culture” had begun to develop in both the UK and the United States.

Peel, born John Ravenscroft, was 20 years old in 1960. He had attended an exclusive public school Shrewsbury, until he was 16. Shrewsbury is, according to one historian, one of the three “truly upper-class” public (i.e. exclusive private) middle and high schools in the UK; the other two are Harrow and Rugby (Marwick 1998: 282). He had a difficult time fitting in with his classmates and spent a great deal of his time alone, listening to records. He did try to interest some of his classmates in the early rock and roll records he was listening to, but they had little interest in them, preferring instead to listen to either classical music or jazz. He was further isolated by his passion for football (soccer in the United States), widely considered a blue-collar sport in the 1950s when Ravenscroft was in school. The indifference and disdain displayed by his classmates made him that much more determined to forge a separate identity from both his classmates and his social class. For the rest of his life he never wavered in his passionate support for Liverpool’s professional football club; and, of course, he never stopped trying to get other people to listen to the music he loved. He had no intention of joining the elite class and spent much of his life trying to shed any vestiges of his association with the country’s ruling class (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005).

In 1960 after completing his two years of compulsory service in the British Army (required of all males under 20 until 1960); he was at a loss as to what to do to make a living. “The consensus seemed to be that there was virtually nothing for which I could sensibly be described as having an aptitude,” he wrote. His father had been a successful cotton broker in Liverpool, but his business was in decline and held no appeal for his oldest son. “[The business was] on its last legs and was stupefyingly boring anyway,” Peel recalled (137). His father offered to send him to America to work for one of his

business contacts in Texas, and within six months he was on a ship bound for Houston, Texas. After disembarking in Houston, he left for Dallas, where he spent three years working in the cotton industry. When The Beatles arrived in the United States in February 1964, the young Ravenscroft found himself, largely by virtue of his accent, very much in demand and managed to secure a position at the dominant Top-40 station in Dallas at the time, KLIF (Rothenbuhler 2006: 8).

### **The Beatles**

It's difficult to think of Britain in the 1960s without The Beatles. Their blithe charm and cheeky insouciance mixed with the ebullience and energy of their early records reflected the spirit of optimism and rebirth abroad in the country. Capturing the can-do spirit of the times, The Beatles embodied the projected potential of the new age. They were a potent symbol for the sea change in attitudes of a people beleaguered by the Second World War and its privations. A large percentage of the population had more money than ever before, and memories of the shortages of necessities as well as luxuries in the late 1940s and 1950s were beginning to recede; and for the first time a new, youthful consumer culture was beginning to develop (Sandbrook 2006).

By 1963 the country's more than 5 million teenagers, the "spendagers" as one tabloid called them, were buying 50 million records and spending a billion pounds a year on clothing and other consumer goods (Sandbrook 2006 : 98). The time was ripe for The Beatles to create the image and provide the soundtrack for what became known as "swinging London." Of the four musicians, John Lennon, in particular, exemplified the developing youthful irreverence of the times. His introduction to the final song The Beatles played for the Royal Family and other dignitaries at The Royal Variety

Performance in London in November 1963 perhaps best illustrates this quality. “For our last number I’d like to ask your help,” he told the audience, while casting a sardonic sidelong glance at his band mates and, perhaps not coincidentally, at the camera. “Would the people in the cheaper seats clap your hands? The rest of you can just rattle your jewelry” (Beatles Anthology, 2003).

By the end of 1963, two singles by The Beatles, “I Want To Hold Your Hand” and “She Loves You” were number one and number two respectively on the singles chart. Their second album, *With The Beatles* was selling so quickly that it held the number 15 slot on the singles chart; they also had three EP’s (45 rpm discs with two songs on each side) in the Top 30 (Norman, 1987: 203-204).

Before The Beatles, rock and roll from the UK and the United States had been given short shrift by the both the mainstream and the music press in the UK. *Melody Maker*, the dominant music-oriented weekly at the time, dismissed rock and roll as “the antithesis ...of good taste and musical integrity.” The *Daily Mail*, a mass-market daily, called the new music “deplorable” and “tribal” (quoted in Sandbrook 2006: 100). The reaction to The Beatles couldn’t have been more different. Following their performance on the Royal Variety Performance, the *Daily Mirror*, another popular mass-market daily, gushed:

Fact is that Beatle people are everywhere....And it’s plain to see why these four cheeky energetic lads from Liverpool go down so big.

They’re young, new. They’re high spirited, cheerful. What a change from the self-pitying moaners, crooning their lovelorn tunes from the tortured shallows of lukewarm hearts.

Youngsters like The Beatles are doing a good turn for show business—and the rest of us—with their news sounds, new looks.

*Good luck, Beatles* (quoted in Norman 2005: 221).

Within a few months they were receiving a similarly enthusiastic response from the press and the DJs on the popular music radio stations in the United States.

### **The Beatles in America**

“It is now 6:30 A.M., Beatle-time. They left London thirty minutes ago. They’re out over the Atlantic Ocean, headed for New York. The temperature is thirty-two Beatle degrees” (Norman 2005: 215). It had snowed overnight in New York on the February day in 1964 when The Beatles’ plane landed at New York’s Idlewild Airport. Stepping groggily from the plane following their first transatlantic flight, they were greeted by the 5,000 fans who had been waiting, undeterred by the weather, to welcome them to New York.

Despite the best efforts of Brian Sommerville, their press officer, their first press conference began chaotically with photographers massed in front of the assembled reporters, where they made too much noise to allow any sort of formal question and answer session. The New York press had come fully prepared to expose the group as another substandard British import, but within a few minutes it was apparent that The Beatles were up to the challenge. After making several polite entreaties for quiet, Sommerville admonished the unruly gathering. “Shut up—just shut up.” The Beatles added, “Yeah, shurrup.” The roomful of battle-weary journalists applauded.

“Are you going to have a haircut while you’re in America?”

“We had one yesterday,” John Lennon replied with a smirk.

“Will you sing something for us?”

“We need money first,” was Lennon’s tart response.

“What’s your secret?”

“If we knew that,” said John, “we’d form four groups and be managers” (quoted in Norman 2005: 221).

And so it went, with the press asking slightly condescending questions and The Beatles parrying every shot with quick witted, thinly veiled sarcasm.

Like the New York press, the Beatles’ American record company, Capitol, had also been skeptical about the group. The Beatles were signed to EMI in the UK, but Jay Livingstone, the chief executive for EMI’s wholly owned American outlet, Capitol, had rejected their first few records. He sent George Martin, their producer, a terse memo giving him Capitol’s assessment of the group’s potential in the United States “We don’t think The Beatles will do anything in this market” (Norman 2005: 202).

Undeterred by Livingstone’s skepticism, Brian Epstein, the Beatles’ manager, had visited New York in the fall of 1963 in an attempt to persuade Capitol to release The Beatles’ most recent British hit, “I Want To Hold Your Hand,” a song Lennon and McCartney had worked hard to craft with “a sort of American spiritual sound” (Norman 2005: 203). Capitol’s executives were still skeptical, but after considerable deliberation agreed to release it on January 13, 1964 in time to promote The Beatles’ debut on the *Ed Sullivan Show* on February 9. The show drew an audience of 75 million (60 percent of the total television audience for that evening). By the first week of April, The Beatles held the top five slots on the Billboard sales chart (Norman 2005).

### **John Peel and The Beatles**

Ravenscroft had arrived in the United States to considerably less acclaim almost four years earlier in the spring of 1960. After spending the night in Houston, he caught a train to Dallas where he was to take a job in the Dallas Cotton Exchange arranged for him



by his father (Peel Ravenscroft 2005: 178). After a time he switched jobs and began work as an office boy with a company that sold crop-hail insurance (187). His only escape from the mundane routine was the radio. He listened to KLIF “as did, it seemed, almost everyone in the Dallas/Fort Worth area” during the day, but at night he listened to a program called *Kat’s Karavan* on WRR (189). From 10 until midnight the station played records by Lightnin’ Hopkins, Jimmy Reed, John Lee Hooker and other second-generation electric blues artists along with comedy records by Jonathan Winters, Shelly Berman, and Brother Dave Gardner (Patoski 2008).

After listening for a time he felt that he could add to WRR’s programming from his own collection “of blues and R ‘n’ B stuff that (was) only available in England or the Netherlands (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 250). He felt his knowledge of the music and his record collection were sufficient to qualify him for the job, but for the Texans, it was more likely his accent that they found most intriguing. (As a result of his public school education, he had the accent, as he put it, of a minor member of the British Royal Family).

According to his account in his autobiography he was given a regular slot on the program for an hour every Monday evening, but when he asked the station to pay him for his time the station’s owners declined and his nascent career came to an abrupt halt (251). There is no record of his appearances on the station and it is quite possible that Peel was exaggerating his role on the program; Rothenbuhler (2006) has suggested that he might have been a guest on the popular program rather than its host. Certainly, in Ravenscroft’s mind, he was not making a great deal of progress in the United States. He told Sue Lawley, host of the BBC radio program, *Desert Island Discs*, that in response to his

father's anxious enquiries, he told him that he was "still an office boy with every prospect of remaining one"(Lawley 1989).

Soon after his ignominious departure from WRR The Beatles arrived in America, and Ravenscroft was transformed over night from an "English chancer with a knack for being in the right place at the right time" into an "English chancer with a knack for being in the right place at the right time" (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 255). According to Ravenscroft, he had been listening to the popular evening DJ Russ "Weird Beard" Knight, on KLIF, as he put it, "talking a great deal of nonsense" about Liverpool and called to correct him. The DJ put him on the air and they chatted about Liverpool and The Beatles. Trading on the fact, as he later told a BBC interviewer, that "the Americans in a rather charmingly naive way assumed that anybody who came from roughly the same area as the Beatles, if they weren't blood relatives, certainly would be an intimate friend," he passed himself off as a Beatles confidante. He didn't say, he was quick to add, he *knew* The Beatles, but again he didn't do anything to dispel that misimpression either (Lawley 1989). Having altered his speech patterns from those of an English public schoolboy to an approximation of George Harrison's more nasal twang, he was hired by KLIF as co-host and resident Beatles' expert on a Saturday afternoon show with Ken Dowe. According to Dowe, "John and I made myriad appearances around Dallas and Fort Worth during the British Invasion, signing autographs and hyping KLIF's association with the world's hottest new music" (quoted in Hepola 2004).

In his autobiography Peel offers few details on his radio experience. His focus on his social life at the time is perhaps due to the novelty of being the center of attention for

the first time in his life. According to Dowe, the young Ravenscroft was “an intense guy, not the life of the party” (quoted in Rothenbuhler 2005: 11).

Within a year, Ravenscroft moved from Dallas to Oklahoma City to take his first full time job in radio at KOMA, a successful Top 40 station owned by Todd Storz. Storz, along with Gordon McLendon, the owner of KLIF, is widely regarded as the architect of the Top 40 format. According to the station’s website, KOMA had been automated for three years, but in 1964 the station’s management made the decision to return to live presentation and began hiring DJs. Given that the station had to hire an entire air staff, Rothenbuhler (2006) speculates that it hired more DJs than it would need and it was giving the still relatively inexperienced Ravenscroft a chance to prove himself. The appeal of his Liverpool accent and assumed Beatles connection also seems to have played a part. Largely it appears that the station gave him a chance to learn his craft. As outlined in Goffman’s (1981) analysis, the DJs craft, if practiced effectively, is largely hidden from the listener. Peel not only learned the technical skills necessary to operate the studio equipment, he also began mastering the art of talking to an unseen radio audience. His approach to radio talk is analyzed in detail later in this chapter, and in Chapter 5, 6 and 7.

According to Paul Menard (known as Paul Miller on the air), he and Ravenscroft worked together as John and Paul, co-hosting the station’s morning show. Ravenscroft, Menard claimed later, “didn’t know how to do it...maybe he guested...I taught him...he sat right next to me, [and] watched everything I did” (quoted in Rothenbuhler 2006: 12). By Peel’s account in his autobiography, the morning show proved to be so popular that when he and his co-host attended high school football games the half-time show would be dedicated to them and they had the almost certainly heady experience of running out

onto the field to cheers from the audience. His popularity declined significantly, however, when during an interview he was forced to admit that he didn't actually *know* The Beatles. The station tried to rescue him by sending him to interview the group in Minneapolis, but it was a disaster and his recording of the "interview" with the group was of such poor quality that he threw it away before returning to the station, telling them that the tape had been "stolen" by a jealous rival (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 259-261). He left the station soon after and moved to Los Angeles.

There, he took a job as the host of the morning show on KMEN in San Bernadino, but was soon moved to the late evening slot between 9 p.m. and midnight (Rothenbuhler 2006: 11). Unlike KOMA, which had a tightly controlled play list and a very powerful 50,000 watt signal which could be heard far and wide across the Great Plains from New Mexico, Arizona, and Wyoming to Kansas, Colorado, and Nebraska, KMEN was a relatively small station 60 miles east of Los Angeles. At KOMA he had had to adhere to the play list, but at KMEN he was given a lot more freedom. It was at KMEN from February 1966 until the spring of 1967 that he began playing many of the California groups, including The Doors, Love and Canned Heat, whose music he would later feature on his programs on Radio London and Radio One. Describing the shows he produced for KMEN on the BBC's website, he gives the impression that the decision to play the music he featured was his:

I started to play records that I wanted to play. Previously it had been all chart stuff. But I had to do six hours over the weekend and I thought, if I was going to do six hours, then I'm going to play what I want to play. I started to play blues things, Doors, Love, Butterfield Blues Band and Jefferson Airplane (BBC 2005).

It was his accent, along with his knowledge of the music, that had prompted the program director at KMEN to hire Ravenscroft. According to Brian Lord, who took over as program director soon after Ravenscroft was hired, “a British accent . . . was very cool in those days... [and Ravenscroft] was fun, knowledgeable and had a great sense of humor.” Lord’s only caveat was that Ravenscroft could be a bit “long-winded,” but he told an interviewer that he extended the young DJ some latitude even though it was against the station’s format, because “he knew so much about the music it was hard to rein him in.” He also sought Ravenscroft’s input on the station’s play list, and he “let John have a free hand . . . because he was very conscious of trends” (quoted in Rothenbuhler 2006: 13). KMEN, according to Lord, did not have a strict rotation on the records they played and Ravenscroft was given the freedom to choose the songs he played. Lord remembered him as someone entirely unsuited to working for a station with a tight play list. He stayed at the station for a little more than a year, and may have stayed longer but for the fact that he was forced to leave town after the station’s management learned that what proved to be false charges of inappropriate relations with a minor had been leveled against both him and Lord. Ravenscroft returned to the UK; Lord returned to his native Canada, but when he learned that charges had been filed against him he returned to face them, and within a “few days...all the charges were dropped.” He implied that the charges leveled against Ravenscroft were equally baseless (Rothenbuhler 2006: 13).

It was while he was at KMEN that Ravenscroft first heard Captain Beefheart and his Magic Band. According to his autobiography, hearing Beefheart for the first time was akin to his first hearing of Elvis Presley’s “Heartbreak Hotel” in the mid 1950s. Seeing Beefheart and his band play at the Whiskey A Go Go on the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles

was “a gig that . . . changed his life” altering forever after “his perception of what music could achieve” (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 272, 275). Beefheart’s genre-bending music became a mainstay of Peel’s *Top Gear* program, particularly in the late 1960s, when he featured a different song from Beefheart’s landmark 1968 album, *Trout Mask Replica*, every week on his show until he had played all 28 songs. On the record Beefheart had deconstructed the blues and created something utterly unlike anything being played by any other rock musician of the time. It was not easy listening. The critic Lester Bangs was nevertheless effusive in his praise for the album:

*Trout Mask Replica* shattered my skull, realigned my synapses....it was a whole new universe, a completely realized and previously unimaginable landscape of guitars splintering and spronging and slanging and even eventually swinging in every direction, as far as the mind could see....[it] perhaps came closer to a living, pulsating, slithering organism than any other record I’d ever heard (Bangs, 1978).

It has since been widely recognized as a landmark recording. *Rolling Stone* included it at #58 on its list of the “500 Greatest Albums of All Time.” The British music magazine, *Mojo*, listed it at #28 on their list of “The 100 Greatest Albums of All Time.” It was an early example of Peel’s ability, already recognized by his peers on the stations he worked for in the United States, not only to recognize and appreciate new and challenging music, but to have the courage of his convictions and to challenge his audience to share his perception.

Another band that had a profound impact on him during his time in California was The Misunderstood. He first heard them when they played at the opening of a new shopping mall in Riverside, California in 1966. His description of the performance is an early example of the kind of writing he would contribute to a number of British

publications in the late 1960s, particularly the short-lived Underground newspaper, *International Times*.

It was like one of your St-Paul-on-the-road-to-Damascus experiences. When they played, I couldn't believe what I was hearing. The shopping mall was filled with the roar and thrust of their music and the lead guitar of Glen Ross Campbell tore strips out of the sky for us to walk on. They are the prophets of a new order, harbingers of a brilliant, soft and alive dawn for mankind (quoted in Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 266).

Peel financed a recording session for the group at the Gold Star Recording studio in Los Angeles. He took the recordings with him when he left for the UK, and began playing them on *The Perfumed Garden*, the late night program he hosted on Radio London. It was the first of many instances where he took the recordings of an unknown and unsigned band and gave them airplay. As a result of his enthusiastic patronage the band was able to move to the UK and to secure a recording contract (Chapman 1992)

When Ravenscroft arrived back in London in the spring of 1967 he found a very different city from the one he'd known before he left the country in 1960. Just as he had profited from The Beatles and their impact on American popular culture, so London too was seeking to profit from its newfound role as a "swinging" city.

### **Swinging London**

Playing on the American preoccupation with Britain's pop culture, Time magazine published a cover story in 1966 that began, "In this century, every decade has had its city....Today, it is London, a city steeped in tradition, seized by change, liberated by affluence....In a decade dominated by youth, London has burst into bloom. It swings, it is the scene" (Halasz 1966: 15). The article went on to describe a city liberated from the "Tory-Liberal Establishment," the upper class graduates from the universities in

Oxford and Cambridge, who ruled an empire from their clubs in the wealthy districts of Mayfair and St. James's, and their offices in the financial district, the square mile known as "The City," in the heart of London. The new ruling class, the article contended, is a "swinging meritocracy" composed of "economists, professors, actors, photographers, singers, admen, TV executives and writers" (Halasz 1966: 16). But, perhaps most significantly, the city's new elite was identified as people born into lower middle class and working class families. "A new group of people is emerging into society," said sociologist Richard Hoggart, "creating a kind of classlessness and a verve which has not been seen before" (quoted in Halasz 1966: 17). And for a time, at least, London did seem to have become the capital of a new classless culture composed of hedonistic young people with lots of money and little to worry about beyond staying in touch with the fast moving fashions in music and clothing at the heart of the city's "renaissance" in this "second Elizabethan era" (Halasz 1966: 18). But, for the majority of people in the country, "swinging London" was a glittery Valhalla populated by pop icons whose carefree opulence was far removed from their daily experience. Historian Robert Murphy described his life in London in the 1960s in rather more prosaic terms. "[I] was working as a fillet's labourer in a fish factory in Grimsby, and when I came down to London in 1968 it might have still been swinging but, living in cheap bed-sits (single rooms in a boarding house) with building workers and kitchen porters for neighbors, I hardly noticed" (Sandbrook 2006: 261).

David Bailey, the photographer born in the slums of the East End of London who rose to fame and fortune as the chronicler of Swinging London's models and pop stars, agreed. Looking back 30 years later he said, "[It] was a very elitist thing for 2000 people



living in London” (Sandbrook 2006: 261). Nevertheless, even though the majority of people in the country didn’t get to experience the freewheeling fashion conscious life first hand, the energy generated by the explosion of new ideas in music, art, film and fashion did serve to inspire many young people to look beyond the relatively narrow horizons their parents had taken for granted as their lot in life. One result of the new “swinging” culture was the appearance of the unlicensed off-shore radio stations that began broadcasting pop music to London and the south-eastern counties in England beginning in 1964.

### **Radio Caroline**

In 1960 Sony had revolutionized radio with the introduction of the TR620, a tiny radio measuring 3 ½” by 2 7/8” which made radio more accessible than ever before, but the BBC had been very slow to reflect the rapidly changing pop music culture. Radio Luxembourg, the only source outside the BBC for popular music, was very popular, but it was hampered by its inability to broadcast before 7 p.m. The time was ripe for an American style Top 40 radio station (Chapman 1992).

On Good Friday, 1964, Radio Caroline the first of the so-called “pirate” stations began broadcasting uninterrupted pop music to London and south east England from a boat anchored in international waters three miles from Frinton-on-Sea in Essex. The idea for an off-shore commercial radio station had originated with an Australian, Allan Crawford, a music publisher with an office in London. He shared his idea with Ronan O’Rahilly, the 24-year-old owner of a fashionable nightclub in London, who was frustrated with the BBC’s reluctance to program pop music. He seized immediately on the potential of Crawford’s idea and began securing the financing. With the backing of a

number of businessmen including Jocelyn Stevens, the editor of *Queen*, a magazine covering the lives of the young British establishment, he formed Planet Productions, registered in Ireland, with a capitalization of 350,000 pounds (\$840,000 approx.). O’Rahilly bought a former 763 ton ferryboat that had been used in the Baltic and had it re-fitted with an antenna and a transmitter.

According to a Gallup poll, within the first three weeks that Radio Caroline was on the air more than seven million people had listened to it (Skues 1994: 14). The poll didn’t include the opinion of anyone under 17; suggesting that the BBC’s reluctance to embrace pop music had frustrated more than just the nation’s 5 million teenagers. James Green, a reporter for the *Evening News* (May 29, 1964) summarized that frustration in an article celebrating the interloper’s impact on British radio. “The BBC was dying. The arrival of the pirates on the air is exactly what the BBC’s planners needed to jerk them into life and action” (Skues 1994: 24).

Many teenagers immediately embraced the station’s freewheeling style modeled on American Top 40 radio, which they found a welcome contrast to the generally rather staid approach of the BBC’s Light Program. One 17 year old listener, echoing James Green, wrote:

Caroline was different. There was the novelty that it was being broadcast from a ship in the middle of the North Sea, but I listened to the station because of the DJs. They made you feel that they were talking TO you as if they were friends—and not AT you (emphasis in the original). They were amusing to listen to. They used to tell funny stories and crack jokes and I used to enjoy listening to them just as much as listening to the music. They were more than a just a link between each record. In a word they were “entertaining.” Radio Caroline was so refreshing after listening to Auntie BBC (Skues 1994: 39).

The listener's comment above summarizes the difference in the approach taken by the DJs on the American-styled offshore stations. They did not talk to the listeners the way announcers on the BBC networks had addressed them. The fundamental difference is in the notion of an audience as opposed to a listener. In the first instance, the term suggests an undistinguished anonymous mass, while a listener is an individual with a distinct identity. By addressing the "listener" rather than the "audience" the DJs engendered the response typified by James Green's response. The listeners began to regard the DJs as companions talking directly to them as equals. Peel's discourse took the approach one step further when he adopted an unhurried, conversational approach that stood in stark contrast to the more typical upbeat, slightly hyperbolic approach typical of Top 40 radio in the 1960s in the UK and the United States.

However, according to Chapman (1992), despite the enthusiasm for the programming on the part of many of the teenagers in the audience (again exemplified by Green), Radio Caroline's impact on the listening figures for the BBC's Light Program were negligible because the station was "catering what had been up until then a largely disenfranchised audience" (48). The "disenfranchised audience" was the teenage audience that the BBC had treated as largely tangential, and had offered only very limited programming aimed at the young audience interested in hearing contemporary pop music.

### **Radio London**

Within the year Radio Caroline had several competitors, the most successful of which was Radio London which began broadcasting from a refurbished United States minesweeper, the mv *Galaxy*, anchored close to Radio Caroline in international waters off the coast of Essex. The station signed on the air at 6 am on Wednesday December 23,

1964 with disc jockey Pete Brady proclaiming: “Radio London...will bring to Britain the very latest from Radio London’s Top 40, along with up-to-date coverage of news and weather. Radio London promises you the very best in modern radio” (quoted in Skues 1994: 177).

Radio London had one of the strongest signals of all the off shore stations. The station’s 50,000 watt transmitter, with a broadcast range of 250 miles (Radio Caroline’s transmitter was 30,000 watts), guaranteed that the station could be heard clearly across the Greater London area and south east England, the most densely populated part of the country with a population of 37 million people, many of whom listened to the station. According to a National Opinion Poll, published in April, 1966, Radio London had a weekly audience of 10,330,000. Of the 2,360 people who responded to a pollster’s questions about which of the commercial stations (if any) they had listened to in the previous week, 20.9 percent said they had listened to Radio London, while 15.6 percent had listened to Radio Caroline (Skues, 1994: 195). Compared to Radio Caroline, which was owned, operated, and manned by people with little, if any, experience in running a radio station, Radio London was a well-financed and professional operation. It was easily the best organized of the so-called pirate stations (a term conjured by the tabloid press). Radio London’s owners didn’t think of themselves as pirates, the station was “a major business concern which just happened as a matter of convenience (or inconvenience) to be located on a ship” (Chapman 1992: 81).

The station’s approach to programming was modeled on KLIF in Dallas, and the owners’ goal was simple, they wanted to establish legitimate commercial broadcasting in the UK. Philip Birch, the station’s general manager, told an interviewer in 1965:

We are not, and have no intention of becoming, law breakers. Our aim and objective is to become a land-based station. Our commercial relation, our program content, and our station behavior proves we are responsible, reliable business people supplying what the public likes and wants.

Offshore commercial radio has given radio a new image. For the man in the car, driving alone, and the lonely housewife, they provide constant companionship. To the teenagers, they mean the instant “beat” presented by a happy disc jockey with a pleasant patter which includes a package of ops and plugs (Skues 1994: 208).

The station was a financial success, but by the spring of 1967, when Ravenscroft returned to London, it was clear to all involved with the station that they would all soon be forced to stop broadcasting. Ravenscroft’s mother was living in a flat in Notting Hill, in North London, and one of her neighbors represented a company which bought advertising with Radio London, he suggested that Ravenscroft might talk to Alan Keen, the station’s program director, about a job on Radio London. He was hired on the spot; Keen didn’t even ask for the customary audition tape giving examples of his previous on-air work. It was a lucky break for a DJ who had proven himself largely unsuited to the discipline of Top 40 radio. “They must have known then that they were going to be closed down shortly and, because I had been working on the radio in California, they didn’t even make me do an audition—which is probably just as well under the circumstances” (quoted in Henry, Von Joel, 210).

Once he was hired he went to the Radio London offices in London. It wasn’t illegal for a British citizen to work for the station at the time, but most of the DJs changed their names anyway. It was in the Radio London office that Ravenscroft gained the professional identity he retained for the rest of his career, and yet his account of the event suggests that he was less than invested in a long-term career at that point. It was a

secretary in the station's office, he later wrote, who, "(looking) up from her emory board," casually suggested, 'Why don't you call him John Peel?'" (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 279). Within months, "Peel" had become synonymous with an entire social, as well as musical, subculture. "During that period when it was fashionable to be me," he wrote later, "folk seeking companionship through the small ads of the *International Times* would describe themselves as 'Peelites.' I don't think I want my religion so personalized" (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 279). The new identity allowed him to retain an ironic and bemused attitude toward his growing celebrity; it was an attitude he would maintain and develop throughout his career. As his wife has noted in his autobiography, Peel's attitude toward celebrities ranged from "amused to disparaging" (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 332). Adopting the name "John Peel" allowed him to develop an identifiable public persona which could, according to his wife, provide "unexpected solace or sanctuary....It was a disguise that was permanently at [his] disposal" (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 279-80). Ravenscroft had become "John Peel," an identity as his wife's comments suggest, that he could don or doff at will. It allowed him to build a widely recognized persona without having to embody it. He could remain John Ravenscroft, theoretically, while playing the character John Peel. For a shy man, and according to all who knew him he was a chronically shy man, it was a way to be in the spotlight, and yet remain apart from it. That attitude was inherent in his on-air persona and his on-air discourse as is discussed in the analysis later in this chapter and in subsequent chapters.

He was frequently described as being self-effacing, a description he found irritating (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 86) because he had no intention in his mind of underselling himself; for him, his "self-deprecating remarks" were nakedly honest self-

evaluation. Ravenscroft was an insecure man (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 334) who used the John Peel persona to advance his modest career goals. Without that persona, the shrinking ravenscroft would probably not have been able to create a persona based upon an imaginary world built on the Peel identity (i.e “Peel Acres” and innumerable references to the “Peelian” persona). Every reference to something “Peelian” is a brick in the wall behind which Ravenscroft hid, while Peel paraded.

### **The Perfumed Garden**

It may have been, as Chapman (1992) has suggested, that the pirate stations were broadcasting to a largely disenfranchised audience, but the disenfranchised audience that began tuning in to Peel’s late night program was one that radio in the UK had almost certainly never conceived of trying to reach, the nascent British underground. He called the show *The Perfumed Garden*, not because of the 16th century text, *The Perfumed Garden Of The Cheikh Nefzaoui*, but because the name apparently evoked a sort of Tolkienesque wonderland which also fired the imaginations of his largely middle class audience. Describing the program, Chapman (1992) noted:

Peel soon established a genuine rapport with his listeners....The evolution of *The Perfumed Garden*, where nightly the underground communicated with itself, mirrored a corresponding stage in the evolution of the whole subculture....The English underground in 1967 was a patchwork of issues and causes. Political activists, influenced by situationism, Mao, or anarcho-syndicalism, brought their playpower gestures of contempt to bear upon the institutional kindergartens of the western world. Seekers of mystical truths took the path of passive resistance, Tolkien, Blake, Tarot and I Ching in their pursuit of wisdom. All tendencies were represented in *The Perfumed Garden*, which became a kind of audio bulletin board for the counter culture and all the self indulgent juxtapositions contained therein....In trying to give equal access both to those who were trying to change the world and to those who were just trying to change themselves Peel too often embodied many of the attendant contradictions and flaws.

His own stance was rarely confrontational, it was a merely a plea for tolerance and was against perceived injustice” (:126).

Peel has often suggested in interviews that he was a pirate among the pirates who took advantage of the fact that nobody on the ship or in the London offices bothered to monitor the late night program.

[I]t dawned on me over a period of time that the lads upstairs were playing cards, or gone to bed, or watching blue films or something. I gradually dispensed with the format and it wasn't until Brian Epstein phoned Alan Keen and congratulated him on having the foresight to put on this excellent program late at night that they all thought 'we'd better listen to this;' when they heard it they were all slightly horrified but it had gone too far for them to stop it really...(quoted in Henry, Von Joel 1984: 111).

It makes for a good story, but in truth the programming after midnight, in contrast to the station's tightly programmed, very professional approach during the day, had always been very loose and had never been very closely monitored largely because the station had a much smaller audience at night. Without the six figure daytime audience, the station found it difficult to sell advertising and its late-night programming was largely, as Chapman (1992) put it, “a managerial afterthought” (122).. A format for the late night program was never officially established, and each DJ who had produced the show had tended to indulge his own musical taste. According to Chapman (1992), “It was this haphazard scheduling inheritance that enabled John Peel to develop his programming ideas without resistance”(123).

Reflecting on the show ten years later, Peel acknowledged that the times had changed, and that the show would probably sound “laughable” to a contemporary listener, but, even then, he didn't find it so. For him, it was the sense of community and shared beliefs that made the show memorable.



I believed in it all passionately. I really felt we were in a position to change the world, and that it would come about as a result of my playing Hendrix and Country Joe records on the radio. I've still got an awful lot of the letters that were sent to me and I read them from time to time and it's obvious from them that we all believed in it; there was no cynicism involved at all—just a very strong sense of idealism and optimism. I suppose there must have been opportunism too at some level, people taking advantage of the situation to make a few bob, but I wasn't aware of it and nor were the people I corresponded with (quoted in Mick Brown 1977: 5).

A letter written by one of his listeners to the “underground” newspaper, *Gandalf's Garden*, a year later echoed his feelings about the program and its impact on the nascent subculture.

John Peel spoke to his listeners kindly, lovingly. He urged them to communicate, to contribute to the programme, to write him letters, to set down their thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears, to send in poems, pictures, anything their minds had created. As much as possible of what he received he would read out, mention or describe over the air. And for all of us, the sense of participation, the sense of involvement with *The Perfumed Garden* was something very real and very personal, and added a new dimension to our lives.

When it became apparent that bureaucracy would force Radio London off the air, that the gates of our magical mystical garden would have to close, and the softly encouraging Peelian voice remain silent, we, the listeners, decided to continue *The Perfumed Garden* as best we could, in our own way, and to communicate with one another. We were not prepared to lose our newly established togetherness even if, for a while at least, we had to lose Peel. So one of our number began collecting names and addresses, and thus the famous *Perfumed Garden* list was born. One thing we are not is the John Peel Fan Club. John is our gentle philosopher, our beloved founder, our good friend. But we all care just as much about each other as we do about John. And this, perhaps, is the very essence of *The Perfumed Garden* and all that it stands for—we are people who CARE” (quoted in Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 293).

A few tapes of the program have circulated on the Internet in recent years. A tape of one of his shows from July 12, 1967, shows that while he was a trained broadcaster, he was beginning to build the persona of an outsider on the inside; a determined interloper who had somehow managed to break through the show business circle. His deliberately casual and apparently unaffected approach to broadcasting resulted in the development of a remarkable parasocial relationship with his audience, as evidenced by the letter quoted above. Listening to the tape it is apparent why people felt he was a “friend” even though they’d never met him. He did all he could to break down the wall separating him from his listeners. While his colleagues attempted to develop their celebrity on a par with the people whose music they played, Peel presented himself as a member of the audience who had managed to slip through the curtain and take over the show.

Contrary to his accounts regarding the program, he didn’t entirely “dispense with the format” (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 283), but rather he created a wry, often self-deprecating pastiche of the conventional Top 40 format. He spoke in a low-key conversational tone with an accent that combined a nasal Liverpudlian twang with the erudition of a well-educated British public schoolboy with a particular fondness for the language. The music he played was a mix of songs from LP’s and singles, many of which he had brought back with him from California. Between the records he chatted with the audience and read their letters.

The transcriptions that follow of some of Peel’s comments between the records on two programs that aired on Radio London on July 12 and August 14, 1967 serve to exemplify his approach. The program that aired on July 12 was his first after having been on leave for a week (all of the DJ’s on the pirate ships worked two weeks on, and one

week off). He sounds like someone talking to a friend or family member after having been separated from them while taking a short holiday.

The show opened with The Beatles' anthem for the Summer of Love, "All You Need is Love." Over the fading notes of the song, Peel begins talking to the audience as one would address a friend:

That's number one this week, and it should be every week...The Beatles and "Love Is All You Need" which is right, actually. And here we are back in *The Perfumed Garden*, at 4 ½ minutes after 12 Midnight, which I regard as being back home again. I had a marvelous break and I have all kinds of beautiful records for you which you'll be hearing for the next couple of hours; actually, for the next couple of weeks, so I hope you'll bear with me. One thing I might mention too, for those people who wrote and said, 'How come we have soul records on Friday and Saturday night instead of *The Perfumed Garden*?' Do not fear, it's all under control. Everything is organized once again.

At one and the same time he is an insider, familiar with the rules and demands of radio formatics. Almost every time he opens the microphone he identifies the program, the station, and gives the time. These reflect the ingrained habits of someone familiar with standard radio practices, something he later alludes to as a "bad habit" he must try to break. His sly, winking asides identify him for the audience as being at one with them even while he is, at least nominally, at one with the station and its formatics. He clearly intends to try to reinvent his approach to his audience; he wants to dispense with what Goffman (1981) refers to as the "personal and habitual locutions" (273) that he has habituated as a professional radio announcer.

Peel had learned his craft on two very successful, very tightly regulated (in terms of the DJs' on air presentation and discourse) Top 40 stations. He had been trained to preface his remarks every time he opened the microphone with the radio station's call

letters. He had also been drilled in giving the time and the temperature during each “break” between the records. That training is apparent in his discourse on Radio London, but it is apparent from his remarks (as noted above) that he had come to regard that kind of raining as antithetical to his desire to communicate with his listeners in a more informal, conversational manner.

The next record he played on the program was by Donovan, a particular favorite of his, which was unreleased in the United Kingdom at that time, but that had been released in the United States. That he had a copy to play further identified him as someone who still had a close tie with America. America, and particularly California, was perceived to be the epicenter of the hippie movement, a distant shining oasis where the values of community they valued were a given. It was largely an illusion, but it was some time before many realized it. George Harrison’s perception of the Haight Asbury district in San Francisco epitomized the way many young people imagined it.

You know, I went to Haight-Ashbury, expecting it to be this brilliant place, and it was just full of horrible, spotty, dropout kids on drugs. It certainly showed me what was really happening in the drug culture. It wasn’t what was I thought of all these groovy people having spiritual awakenings and being artistic (The Beatles 2000: 58).

Despite Harrison’s disillusionment, it was some time before the reality of California’s golden culture was apparent to most of the young people enamored of its mythology. The mythology was so powerfully constructed by so much of the music coming from southern California in the late 1960s. Many young music fans in the UK thought of California in the same way that young music fans in the United States regarded London and Liverpool. For the young British fans it was the source of so much of the music they loved, it was the exotic sounding places mentioned in the songs, and it was the birthplace of many of

their musical heroes. That Peel had lived in the United States and had worked on American radio stations made him, as he noted, a fashionable figure. Following the record, he began again with the standard DJ chat identifying the record and giving the time:

That's Donovan, on the Epic label from America...8 minutes after 12 Midnight on *The Perfumed Garden*. And, uh...you'll have to forgive me for not being here yesterday. You probably didn't notice; but, actually, after a night of revelry at festive Peel Acres (the name he gave every place he lived in the UK) I didn't wake up in time to catch the train on Tuesday morning. I actually didn't wake up until about 1 o'clock in the afternoon. And, uh...a very nice chap in the office forgave me, you see. And so here I am today. And if you're wondering about the Zodiac Cosmic Sounds (a recently released LP mixed electronic music with an announcer's voice describing the characteristics of a person born under one of the twelve signs of the zodiac) contest for which I've had a million...well, not a million, I exaggerate, but a lot of entries with some fantastically glorious things that people have done for me. And letters! Amazing. It just makes me feel very wonderful about the whole thing. You wouldn't believe the letters I have been receiving, and I hope the trend will continue, you know. I just wish it was possible for me to answer all of them. It's not, because I can't write eleven letters at a time, unfortunately. I've been working on it, but I can't do it. Anyway...um...I had a marvelous time when I was off, and I met some very good people. I went to the UFO club, as usual; I had another marvelous night down there.

Again he is both following standard radio practice in engaging his audience and soliciting a direct response from them by organizing a contest, albeit with a vaguely defined payoff, and one tailored to the audience for his program inasmuch as it is essentially an anti-contest, a parody of standard radio practice. He is benefiting from the practice because his listeners are writing to him in response to the contest. It is another example of his dual persona of a radio professional aware of the value of even some of radio's cheesier practices, and yet at the same time willing to make fun of them in a way that increased

his credibility with an audience suspicious of the motives of the station's commercially oriented owners.

He mentioned UFO a couple of times during the program. Called "England's first psychedelic nightclub" (<http://www.hoppy.be/>), by the Cambridge university trained physicist, John "Hoppy" Hopkins, who opened the basement club for weekly concerts late in 1966 with his partner, Joe Boyd, UFO was the meeting place for the nascent underground community. Hopkins also edited the alternative newspaper, *The International Times*, which propagated the ideas of the self-described counter-culture, which had its roots in the British anti-nuclear movement of the late 1950s. Hopkins was an ardent opponent of the development of nuclear power and an anti-war activist. Boyd, like Peel, was more interested in the music. His vision for the club was to provide

[A] place for experimental pop music and also for the mixing of medias, light shows and theatrical happenings. We also show New York avant garde films. There is a very laissez faire attitude at the club. There is no attempt made to make people fit into a formula, and this attracts the further out kids of London. If they want to lie on the floor they can, or if they want to jump on the stage they can, as long as they don't interfere with the group of course (quoted in Miles 2006 :76).

In fact, the contrast between Boyd, the music fan, and Hopkins, the politically motivated activist mirrored the split in the hippie subculture. Peel, like Boyd, was largely interested in the music. Reflecting on the period ten years later, he told an interviewer:

It was very difficult for me because I realized that I was essentially a fraud. I believed—perhaps more strongly than most people involved—that things were changing, and yet I knew that I was too conservative by nature; I stand on the sidelines and watch. I did go to Grosvenor Square and chuck stones at a blue-rinsed American matron outside the Europa hotel; I went on the Oz marches and testified at the trial and so forth, but I couldn't see

myself actually manning the barricades if it ever came down to it (Brown 1977: 5).

According to Boyd, “The majority of the UFO crowd just wanted to get high and laid and listen to great music. They believed in the social and political goals of the movement, but (like Peel) weren’t prepared to dig a trench on the front line to achieve them” (Boyd, 2006: 152). But to identify yourself as a hippie did mean making a socio-political statement because youth culture was again split between at least two subcultures (i.e. hippies and skinheads) in the late 1960s..

Earlier in the decade the two dominant youth subcultures had been the “mods”, young working class men and women who favored finely tailored Italian suits, designer dresses and neatly styled hair and who aspired to the middle class occupations denied to their parents, and their counterparts, the “rockers,” blue collar conservatives unsettled by the rapid social changes who were trying to hold onto the music and values of the 1950s. Battles between the two groups were widely documented in the newspapers in 1964 and 1965.

By 1967, the children of the middle class had begun to rebel against the values of the new “scientific” age. Calling themselves hippies, after their counterparts in California, they began wearing clothes and hairstyles that reflected the romanticism of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras between 1900 and the 1920’s. At the same time the “mods” had begun to morph into skinheads, an aggressively male centered fashion. The skinheads, as the name implies, shaved their heads and dressed in jeans and workboots to emphasize “their gritty, anti-romantic riposte to middle-class flower power” (i.e. hippie) fashions.

The schism between the two was a division defined by class, income and education (Sandbrook 2006)..

Peel was closer to the hippies not only in terms of his background but also in the music he liked. He affected the hippie lifestyle as far as drug taking also, but while many of the people in the club used LSD, Peel thought that “taking LSD was rather like going to Stratford -Upon-Avon: once you’d done it I see any need to do it again” (quoted in Sandbrook 2006 :521). His attitude toward marijuana, the other drug popular with the UFO crowd, was similar. “I used to smoke quite a lot, but I’m a very practical bloke in a way and I found that if I did radio programs when I was stoned they always sounded terrible; the record would end, ‘Wow, man—that’s rilly beautiful...’ It sounded great to me but terrible to everybody else. It was a lot easier to do them straight really...” (quoted in Brown 1977: 5).

For Peel the appeal seemed to lie more with the music and the sense of community. As Joe Boyd put it, “Despite differing notions of what the revolution was about, an atmosphere of *agape* was pervasive in 1967: people were fundamentally quite nice to each other” (Boyd 2006 :154). The notion that people should be “nice to each other” along with an open-minded approach to music was the essence of Peel’s message on his radio program. While his Radio London audience was not perhaps as open-minded toward the music as he would have liked, his attitude toward his audience largely exemplified his belief in mutual respect as a basic value all should share.

It might be noted here, that Peel was not so open-minded about music either. Music is often tied up with identity in youth culture and in this period in the 1960s the split was between the black American soul music, a secular version of black gospel,



avored by the skinheads, and the psychedelic rock of the the San Francisco groups and, of course, The Beatles.

Later in the program he gave a lengthy introduction to a record by a group he met while in California, The Misunderstood. Their music epitomized the mix of blues and psychedelic rock played by the groups from San Francisco and Los Angeles in the late 1960s. The record he played was the group's interpretation of a song written by the American blues musician Jimmy Reed. Their performance was very much like that of The Rolling Stones at the time. It is just one of many examples from the period of American musicians imitating British musicians' carefully crafted imitations of black American singers and musicians. The song, as he had explained before playing it, was recorded under his supervision in a studio in Los Angeles.

One of the most glorious evening's of my life took place with The Misunderstood in a club called Pandora's Box on the Sunset Strip in Hollywood. They went in there to play, and it's one of those places where people go so they won't be impressed. You know, the kind of place where everyone is sitting around saying, "We're not going to be impressed." And...um...The Misunderstood went up there and they started off with a 24 minute version of "Smokestack Lightning," with little, tiny, spidery Glen standing over his guitar just flashing out these beautiful, stunning, staggering sounds. People were clutching their faces, the tension was building up, and up and up. They were going mad. And, by the time the thing was over everybody in the place was standing by the stage and they closed the bar. They'd stopped dancing and they were just standing there looking. And when they got through, they didn't clap or anything, they just stood there sort of turned into great, beautiful pillars of something. It was marvelous, it really was. I wish you'd been there.

This is an early example of Peel's discourse as a fan, reporting from the perspective of a spectator, rather than as one with an insider's knowledge which he clearly had having worked with the group in the studio. He closes his enthusiastic review of the groups'

performance, delivered as if he is chatting with a friend, by suggesting that he is addressing only one person ( “I wish you had been there”); but as Montgomery (1985) has suggested, the pronoun is imprecise and may be interpreted as a personal address when in fact it addressed to many listeners at that point. Peel’s tone of voice and genial attitude certainly invite the listener to interpret as addressed specifically to him or her.

Throughout the program his approach is friendly, and chatty, as he segues from personal anecdotes to standard DJ patter—time, title, artist—frequently undermined by slyly droll asides. Introducing the next song by Simon and Garfunkel, called “Sparrow,” he makes reference to a letter he received from a listener who told him he had been a raven prior to becoming a sparrow. He concludes his introduction by saying that the duo is now going to “sing our song,” adding in a murmur over the opening notes of the song, “alliteration there, did you notice?” Aware of his erudite professionalism he regularly attempts to undercut it with self-mocking asides. As for the notion that the listener claimed to have been a bird goes by without comment is an exemplar of the period when all manner of peculiar notions were accepted as a given, to do otherwise was to mark oneself as one outside the circle drawn by the nascent hippie community.

Later in the program he returns to another theme familiar to anyone listening to his programs both on Radio London, and later on the BBC, in the late 1960’s.

I had my last walk across Hyde Park yesterday. If you step across into Hyde Park from Park Lane you walk straight into all those trees which are whispering ageless, unheard of secrets to one another, and exchanging dark green words of love. You should go there. It’s very beautiful, actually. I love walking across the park...24 minutes before one...I said I wasn’t going to tell you the time, anymore. Anyway, here’s a track from a Jimmy Reed LP...People write and say, “Why do you play Jimmy Reed from time to time? His things are so incredibly basic and monotonous.” I don’t

think there's anything wrong with being basic actually, really. I mean, you know, basic, simple, simplicity is beautiful.

His description of Hyde Park reflects the infatuation with Tolkien, so prevalent at the time, evidenced by his anthropomorphic description of the trees in the park “whispering ageless unheard of secrets.” It is a fanciful, whimsical view of nature in line with Rousseau's idealized view of the natural world that was at the heart of the hippie philosophy of flower power. Then, abruptly, in the midst of his reverie he returns to his role as a radio DJ giving the time before introducing the next record. At this point he was engaged in the process of re-inventing his approach, and his discourse is particularly revealing in that it straddles his two identities—the first being the identity represented by his U.S-trained persona as a Top 40 radio DJ, the second the new persona he was developing as John Peel, an unorthodox DJ outside the generally accepted model as exemplified by his colleagues at Radio London. But before playing the record by one of the American blues musicians he featured regularly on the program, he takes a moment to allude to listeners' written comments on the music. It is an echo of his earlier remarks in response to listeners' complaints about the “soul music” played during the week he was away. However, while he concurred with the inherent prejudice in those comments, this time he takes issue with the lack of open mindedness. It is, as Chapman suggested, an instance where Peel reflected the contradictions inherent in the hippie culture's attitude of embracing everybody—it was often an embrace extended only to those who were of the same mind. (Chapman 1992)..

The next time he opened the microphone his remarks suggest that while he was a fashionable London insider at one with the musicians whose music he was playing, he was at the same time a fan no different from any other in his radio audience.

Um...what was I going to tell you about? Oh yes, during the last week I saw some famous people, too. When I was in the Kings Road (a fashionable section of the Chelsea district in West London) with Jeff Dexter ( a London club DJ) last weekend, I saw Mick Jagger and Keith Richard, and I should have gone up and said "Hello," you know, thank them for being themselves and everything on behalf of all *The Perfumed Garden* people, but I didn't. Afraid they might think it was a drag, which it probably would have been, actually. Anyway, and...uh...I think I saw Donovan too, I may be wrong, on Sunday morning in Portobello Road (in Notting Hill) which is, you know, by no means impossible. And I definitely met Jeff Beck, finally. Great. And what a nice man he is too. Terrific person, actually. You know, I'm always terrified when I have to meet people because I'm always afraid they're going to shatter whatever preconceived notions I may have about them. Perhaps it's as well they do. Anyway, Jeff Beck is a very nice person. And, uh...he went and got a copy of his record which I didn't actually have at the time from the disc jockey at The Speakeasy (a fashionable nightclub in London West End). I know all the in places, actually...

He talks to the audience as if he is one of them and not a person with an established reputation among the fashionable London "in crowd." Goffman (1981) refers to this as a "change of footing" (128). Peel shifts from a direct mode to an indirect mode in which he sets himself apart from the role he might otherwise appear to be assuming (i.e. as one on an equal footing with the pop stars of the day). The musicians sought him out because he was the only person likely to give them the airplay they needed to promote their work. But, aware of his audience, he is careful to make it clear that he is just an "ordinary bloke" with extraordinary connections. He maintains his identity as a fan; he is no different from his listeners who would also be intimidated by the perceived glamour of the musicians and celebrities with some of whom Peel was already on a first name basis.

It is significant that he always refers to them by both their first and last name. It marks him as a fan who by a combination of luck and judgment has found himself in a position that almost anyone in his audience would love to have. But rather than presenting himself as being at one with the stars of the day, a tendency of many of his colleagues both then and now, he separates himself from them reinforcing the notion that he is an everyman. Goffman refers to this as “hedging” (1981: 285). It is a technique that enables Peel to talk to his listeners from the point of view of an insider, while maintaining his identity as an outsider, as an everyman at one with his listeners. For an audience both suspicious of the phony hyperbole of show business, and yet at the same time as susceptible to its glamour, Peel’s presented himself as a down to earth aficionado for whom it was the music not the musicians that mattered.

As noted by Chapman (1992) there were few commercials scheduled at this time of night on Radio London. However, in every instance, before playing them, he makes a point of introducing them. Earlier in the program he announced, “Some commercial announcements tonight, here is the first.” Following the spot, featuring an announcer with a transatlantic accent and a singing jingle advertising a hair gel, he bemoaned the fact of his increasing baldness. “I have enough trouble keeping the hair on my head without worrying about the shape it’s in, really.” This only served to increase his credibility as an outsider, but had the station not been about to close-down his comments would have resulted in at least a reprimand from the program director. The first rule at any commercial radio station is that the announcers are never supposed to make any reference to the commercials—and they’re certainly never supposed to draw attention to them as he did when he introduced it, and never to comment on the message. He did both, each time

he played a pre-recorded commercial, and when he read commercial copy advertising a London ballroom he took it a step further.

*It's time for a commercial announcement, you see. Don't miss going along to the Locarno Ballroom in Streatham on Thursday because that great group from Gibraltor, The HT, will be playing live. We can assure you that this is going to be a night of entertainment that you cannot, under any circumstances, miss. So (with exaggerated enthusiasm in his voice) grab your coats (I wonder why the emphasis on 'grabbing coats.' There must be a deep rooted Freudian thing there). Anyway, go along to the Locarno Ballroom this Thursday, (his voice rising) the 13<sup>th</sup> of July, and enjoy The HT. Actually, lots of people have told me they're very good, so there.*

This is an example of the meta-discourse, Goffman (1981) refers to as a “qualifier” (285); Peel is separating himself from the script. As Goffman noted, the announcer is assumed to be speaking for the sponsor and to be a partner in his efforts to sell his product. Peel was happy to sell the ideas prevalent in the counter culture at the time, but it was essential for his credibility with his audience that he was not perceived as simply an announcer putting his imprimatur on any product. It was a policy that he maintained throughout his career. He refused to lend his voice to commercial announcements for a product he or his family did not use. According to his manager, Clive Selwood, at one point in the early 1970s he refused to record a commercial for a national bank in the U.K. because the bank had investments in South Africa which was still had a policy of apartheid at that time. As a result of his refusal, according to Selwood, he lost the equivalent of his annual salary from the BBC at the time (Selwood 2007).

Later, introducing a poem from The Liverpool Scene mentioned earlier, he takes a moment to scold the audience members at the UFO club on the night the group appeared there. “Incidentally, those of you who saw them at the UFO club, a lot of you...a lot of

people were complaining, and saying they didn't like it. You didn't give them a chance. You should've listened because you spoiled what was really a very beautiful evening."

From the outset of his career in the U.K. he was both a promoter of music and artists who didn't receive immediate approbation from the audience, and a man destined to be regularly disappointed by an audience that didn't recognize the value of much of the music he wanted so much for them to embrace. This may not have been the first occasion on which he scolded his audience for their indifference, but it was far from the last. This is a point that will be touched on again in Chapter 6. Peel, like Reith, believed in challenging his listeners, but they were not used to being challenged, and in many instances they made it clear they did not want to be challenged. He frequently commented on his listeners' resistance to his attempts at challenging their taste and his response sometimes sounds angry and frustrated, at others, as in the following comments, almost mystified.

I was told a few years ago by a physiotherapist that I was born with a very small muscle missing in my back - I had no idea it was missing, it's never bothered me. But I often feel as though the bit of me that makes most of my contemporaries want to listen to Grateful Dead records for the rest of their lives, that just seems not to have been there when I was born (quoted in Coolidge, Wright 2007: 11).

An example of a more frustrated, angry response appeared in one of his columns for *Sounds* in the 1970s in which he wrote:

I thought again how sad it is that many good people, who eight or nine years ago had to put up with a lot of crap from folks averse to their long hair and Country Joe & The Fish LPs, are now dealing out the same sort of crap to the latest generation of rock fans.

If you doubt that they are then you should inspect the genuine and unsolicited mail I get at the BBC when I play, say, a track by The Clash. The letters are couched in pretty similar terms to those I get from listeners

who have somehow arrived at the conclusion that my playing Irish music makes me a gunman, or playing reggae makes me a traitor to my race (Peel 1977: 50).

At 1 am., he gave the time and identified the station, before playing a jingle to introduce the weather forecast. In another instance of his insider/outsider approach, following the weather forecast he introduced a series of anarchic recordings by the American group The Mothers of Invention by dedicating one of the songs called “The Son of Suzy Creamcheese” to Suzy “who I hear is in trouble, as is Hoppy (John Hopkins) for defending our basic freedoms.” He may not have been willing to “man the barricades,” but his comment suggests he was nevertheless willing to use his position to defend people he felt had been treated unfairly by the establishment. Perhaps the most celebrated example was his appearance at the Oz magazine trial in 1971.

### **“Radio London is Closing Down”**

In 1966, according to a National Opinion Poll, 45% of the population was listening to Radio Luxembourg (which had 8,800,000 listeners), Radio Caroline (8,818,000 listeners) and Radio Caroline’s strongest competitor, Radio London (which had an audience of 8,140,000) (Street, 2002, p.109). But despite the popularity of the offshore stations, the Labor government, led by Harold Wilson, was determined to silence them. On June 13, 1967, the Marine, etc (Broadcasting) Offences Bill making it illegal to service the ships was signed into law. The new law took effect on Tuesday, August 15, 1967. The law forbade British companies to supply the ships with basic provisions, as well as making it illegal for U.K. citizens to work for the offshore stations, and outlawing on-air advertising on the stations by any U.K. based company. With the exception of Radio Caroline, all of the offshore stations accepted defeat.



Beginning at midnight on August 14<sup>th</sup>, Peel hosted an extended edition of *The Perfumed Garden* that continued throughout the night rather than stopping at 2 a.m. The program was the usual freewheeling blend of poetry, letters and music, and on this occasion he did dispense almost entirely with the format, except for those ubiquitous hair gel commercials that continued to pop up throughout the program, along with his singular weather forecasts: “It’s going to be, let me see, a little cloudy, but mainly dry tonight, with the temperature falling to ten degrees or fifty degrees depending on which way you like to count them. And today will be cloudy with rain in places becoming heavier as the day progresses. Temperatures will be a cool 19 degrees centigrade, sixty six degrees Fahrenheit, and the winds will freshen; outrageous. The outlook for Tuesday is rain at times with sunny intervals which sounds like a very dodgy day indeed. It’s just as well we’re coming off, really.”

The show began with the opening song from “Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band.” The song’s opening line introducing it the song as one that Sergeant Pepper taught the band to play “twenty years ago today” is a mix of nostalgia and communal optimism followed on the record by another song celebrating friendship and community, “I get by with a little help from my friends....” The Beatles had tapped into the hippie zeitgeist which Peel’s program had come to exemplify.

Following The Beatles, he introduced the program by acknowledging the community that had developed around the program.

During the next five and a half hours or...actually five hours and twenty minutes as it is now...I’m going to play all of the records that have made us happy in *The Perfumed Garden*, and all of the records which...you know, there are a lot of records. We’ll need five hours and twenty minutes to do it. I hope you can stay until 5:30 because it’s a long night, you know.

We've got an awful lot to do, and an awful lot of very beautiful things to hear.

The next record was by Donovan who he introduced as the winner of another "contest", this one to identify the "true" poet laureate of the time.

...the winner, actually, if there is a winner, in our thing for "Who is going to be our next Poet Laureate?" with Roger McGough, second, and John Lennon, third; but, really, there are no winners and losers. Perhaps we should all collectively be Poet Laureate if we could found such an office.

Following the record he talked again about the number of letters he'd received in the previous week reinforcing the sense of a community of listeners centered on the program, not, significantly, on him.

I had an awful lot of letters again yesterday...or, at least, *The Perfumed Garden* did for which many thanks. Something like...gosh, somewhere around 350 which is... you know... just amazing, and people are so kind, and generous, and thoughtful. And, uh...the main question they asked was 'What now with *The Perfumed Garden*?' Obviously, it's difficult to say because at this stage it is obviously over. But I'm living in hope that in some ways it is just the start because I may, sort of, fade away, and, you know, just disappear, but that's not particularly important. The important thing is that if anybody, anywhere has gained anything from it, and learns that they should try to understand the people who live next door to them, or the people who live down the street and love them, then that's good. And if just one person practices that, you know, for the rest of their lives as a result of some of the things that have been said by myself and other people in *The Perfumed Garden* then we will have worked a miracle between us. And, I think, in some ways we have, actually. Besides who can tell what's going to happen from now on? I have (hesitates)...no job to go to as far as a job goes. I'm not unduly concerned about it, though, actually, because something good is going to happen. Good things are happening, and a lot of people are realizing what is going on. More people are coming over to our side, so to speak...if there is a side to be taken. Actually, it's a sort of non-side really which... (chuckles) if you know what I mean. Anyway, a lot of people have derived considerable pleasure from UFO, which was on Tottenham Court Road, and now, of course, is at the Roundhouse (a disused locomotive turning shed in North London). If UFO had a signature tune I suppose this would be it, and these are The Purple Gang.

The focus of his remarks is clearly on the program as, as Chapman (1992) characterized it, a “bulletin board for the counter culture.” He assumes that his listeners are in accord with him on his vision for a new world order based on mutual empathy and sympathy with others. As Boyd (2006) noted, for a time in the summer of 1967 when Peel was on the air, it did seem as if perhaps the ideals of the counter culture might become a reality. But, as Peel noted earlier when looking back ten years later, outside of that brief period it does seem “laughable,” or perhaps naïve.

Following a record by Janis Joplin with Big Brother and The Holding Company, titled “Call On Me,” he invited his audience to do just that.

...and you must, whenever you want to, either come and visit me, or call on me, if you need me, I shall be there, you know, in some way. I wish we could all be together, actually, tonight in some beautiful place somewhere...in *The Perfumed Garden*, just all together. It won't be necessary for us to speak to one another because we'll all understand and right away it'll all be so nice. And one of these days...one of these days it's going to happen somewhere, somehow in some set of circumstances we can't even envisage yet.

Later in the show, introducing another of the songs from “Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band” he became so enthusiastic in his praise for the album that he had to admit that others felt he was exaggerating its merits, but it was his unbridled enthusiasm for music and ideas that drew his listeners to him. He seemed to be articulating the ideals of many in his audience. He could be overly earnest, as he himself realized, and he attempted to undercut the seriousness of his comments with self-deprecating wit.

Of all the things I've done since I've been in radio for about three or four years, nothing will ever surpass the opportunity that Ed Stewart (the station's head DJ) gave me of playing some of the tracks from the Sergeant Pepper's LP for the first time anywhere in the world. I felt like,

you know, the man who conducted Beethoven's Eighth for the first time; and people have said, you know, 'Actually, that's ridiculous. It's not that important.' It is. It was the culminating thing of my entire radio career, as far as I'm concerned.

There were many other records in the years to come that would inspire him to rise to heights of passionate enthusiasm. He never seemed to lose that ability to hear music without any preconceptions and to respond to it the same way he responded to Elvis Presley the first time he heard him on the radio. He held his audience in equally high regard. He was as fulsome in his praise for his listeners and the ideals they shared, as he was for the music that expressed those optimistic visions of a better world.

Following The Beatles' song "The Word" in which John Lennon sings, "...and the only word is love..." he assured his listeners again of his belief in the promise inherent in the hippie philosophy that love would indeed save the world.

'The Word,' and that's The Beatles and the word is love which is exactly right. That sums it all up, really. I keep saying that, but it really does. And...I'd be very unhappy, I suppose, and very depressed and sad right now, if it wasn't for the fact that I have Peel Acres and Hamster Hall, and the other places you've heard me talk about, and the people that I have, actually, physically almost, with me, and mentally. It's just exactly the same as, like, being right there all together in one enormous great thought all going out virtually saying the same things I'm saying if they have the opportunity to do so. And this is why it makes sense for me to say that *The Perfumed Garden* has been the most beautiful experience in my life as a result of the reaction of people who've had no reason to react at all to it particularly. It's made me very happy, and if this thing is going to come to a temporary setback, but uh...you know, from here on we'll get down a bit and things will look bad and we'll come right back and we'll go up higher than we've ever been before. It's going to be wonderful, you wait and see.

At the close of the program he again exhorted his audience to stay in touch with each other by making a *Perfumed Garden* badge so that "others will know who you are."

It's unlikely, unless there's a dramatic change in plans and policies and things that you'll have an opportunity to hear The Velvet Underground

and Captain Beefheart and His Magic Band and The Mothers of Invention and people like Country Joe and The Fish...to hear them on the radio again, at least, not for a long time. And so every time you do, think about *The Perfumed Garden*, and don't forget to wear that badge, however ridiculous you feel, because this is the only way I can think of that we can communicate successfully one with another. And unless we communicate we can't keep things going, you know, really we've got to do our best to do so. There are enough people in London who believe the same way that I do that we can actually get away with it and do it. I can't take you to the sun (a reference to a song he often played by The Misunderstood), but we can all go together.

He then played the song by the Misunderstood to close his last program. Within six weeks of the close of Radio London, on September 30, 1967, the BBC launched Radio One, the station designed to replace the outlawed offshore stations. One of the programs on the new network was *Top Gear*. The producer for the program, Bernie Andrews, had listened to Peel's programs on Radio London and he was determined that Peel should be the host for the show (Andrews 2007). Some members of the management of Radio One disagreed, but Andrews was allowed to hire Peel as a guest host for one show—it must have felt for Peel at the time as if he had come full circle from his days with KLIF in Dallas. After listening to the program a number of the network's executives were convinced that Peel was not someone they wanted on the new station. According to Robin Scott, the controller for the new network, "There was a feeling in-house that John was almost too much his own man to let loose" (quoted in Peel, Ravenscroft: 218). Bernie Andrews was determined to make it happen; but, as Peel had suggested it would in his closing remarks on Radio London, *The Perfumed Garden* had disappeared. Looking back on his first program for Radio One, Peel told an interviewer, "The people who were responsible for programming were trying to create something out of nothing

really and they had no idea of what it was I wanted to do or had been doing” (quoted in Chapman 1992: 245).

When Radio London closed down, Peel’s career was at a crossroads. He could continue to develop the persona he had begun to create on his late-night radio program, but, at that time, he did not have an outlet on which to do anything like that. According to Selwood (2007), “[W]hen Radio London closed down, John was seriously considering...he denies it now, but I know at the time he was considering applying for a job at London Zoo as a keeper.” Peel’s remarks during his final program for Radio London suggest that he thought his radio career in the U.K. might very well be ending almost before it had started. However, he did not really think in terms of a career at that point in time (Selwood 2007), and he had yet to realize his Reithian vision on Radio One, the only place, as he frequently acknowledged, where it would have been possible for him to develop the programming and persona exemplified in his broadcast discourse analyzed in this chapter.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Ravenscroft was devoid of any career ambitions after completing his National Service. Once his father had sent him to America (a move he apparently resisted, according to his autobiography), Ravenscroft began pursuing a position at one of the local radio stations in Dallas (WRR) where he first settled in the United States in the early 1960s. As noted earlier in this chapter, the years he spent as a broadcaster in the United States are only sketchily detailed in his autobiography, but the overriding impression left by the comments from his colleagues (quoted in this chapter) suggest that he was still, in large part, an enthusiastic amateur. His approach to his work at Radio London, and his attitude toward the management and

the station's formatics, along with Selwood's comment, suggest he was still not taking his career development very seriously.

It is one of the fundamental contentions of this study that Peel spent much of his life as a broadcaster as an "outsider;" however, when Peel began working for the BBC, while he retained the persona of an outsider, he became an insider in that he was seriously invested in realizing his Reithian ambitions, and for the first time he was working for an organization that would, albeit often begrudgingly, support that ambition. In his autobiography he noted:

"I am genuinely ridiculously proud to have worked for the BBC for as long as I have....I'm also grateful that in all of the 37 years I have worked for Radio One, no-one in management has ever said that I should either be playing something that I'm not playing or not playing something that I am. I doubt this would have happened in the commercial radio sector" (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005 :87).

It is unlikely, as he suggested, that Peel would have been able to create the kind of programming that regularly challenged his listeners' expectations if he had continued to work for a commercial radio station. Radio One allowed him to develop his idiosyncratic broadcast persona, and to challenge many of the precepts of pop music radio as detailed in this chapter.

Radio One began as the BBC's attempt at reproducing the sound of the loosely regulated offshore stations, but its bureaucratic structure made that impossible. John Walters, who would later produce Peel's program, first visited Radio One in 1967. Walters description of the BBC's approach to creating a radio program makes it very clear why many of the ex-Radio London DJs, used to working autonomously in a small

studio controlling the equipment and speaking extemporaneously, found the transition almost impossible. He told an interviewer:

The presenter would sit at a table with a microphone and a script and his own stop-watch. There would be a producer and his secretary, both of whom had stop-watches going, timing down to the exact minute and second, making sure things went in and out as on the script. Nothing would be left to chance. Nothing was ever dropped or changed unless you ran out of time. Then the producer would say, 'Drop the Herman's Hermits' or whatever, and move straight on. There was also someone in the back ground playing the records, someone else playing the tapes. There seemed to be all these people waiting for hand cues or verbal cues which were worked out. You would go through the whole show all morning, 'topping and tailing,' rehearsing in cues, out cues, break for lunch and then do the show live in the afternoon. There were all these instructions, all this watching the clock. One guy could have done it (quoted in Chapman 1992: 248).

It may have been true that "one guy could have done it," but the BBC did not work that way. Many of the young DJs used to a much less structured approach could not make the transition. For Peel it must have been particularly difficult because he could no longer develop his persona as he had on Radio London. He could no longer read his listeners' letters, freely extemporize flights of fancy, play or read poetry, and he was no longer alone in the studio. He worked with a co-host for the first six months of the program, and he worked with a producer whose concept of the program was as well defined as his own. But before looking at the challenges Peel faced in working on *Top Gear* with his producer, Bernie Andrews, it is necessary to briefly outline the history of the BBC and its culture as defined by John Reith, the first man to head the BBC, and the unlikely model for Peel's programming philosophy.



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<sup>i</sup> John Peel was an English farmer and fox hunter celebrated in the folk song, “Do Ye Ken John Peel” written by John Woodcock Graves in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The song is sung to the tune of a earlier Scottish folk song, critical of the English, called “Bonnie Annie.” (Serle 1949).

## **Chapter Four**

### **John Reith & The British Broadcasting Corporation**

The BBC is “an invention in the sphere of social science no less remarkable than the invention of radio transmission in the sphere of natural science (W.A Robson, quoted in Briggs, 1985: 151)

#### **Introduction**

Before examining Peel’s career at the BBC, it is necessary to insert a brief outline of the history of the BBC and the concept of public service broadcasting as defined by John Reith, the founding director general of the organization. This chapter is designed to help the reader unfamiliar with the culture of the BBC understand why Peel spent much of his career at odds with the administration of this government-funded cultural institution despite the fact that his approach to broadcasting mirrored Reith’s philosophy.

Peel was not, of course, the only DJ who found the byzantine BBC bureaucracy a challenge. Annie Nightingale, the DJ with the longest history with Radio One since Peel’s passing, said “We all experience this maddening frustration, sometimes, working there. But, in order not to let it get on top of you, you have to find a way to beat the system. Actually, it’s a wonderful organization, but because it’s so big it can become very bureaucratic and very irritating, you know....”(Nightingale 2007).

#### **Origins**

In 2008, the BBC is one of the largest broadcasting operations in the world with two terrestrial and six digital television channels in the U.K., as well as its commercial

subsidiary BBC Worldwide Limited, which distributes BBC programming via satellite and cable channels to most parts of the globe (BBC 2008).

The BBC runs five national terrestrial radio stations and four digital channels, as well as a network of 40 local radio stations. And then there is the BBC World Service, funded by the Foreign Office, which broadcasts worldwide (in 43 languages and dialects, including English) on shortwave to a global audience of 140 million people in 139 countries (BBC 2008). Few, if any, of the people involved in the creation of the BBC at the outset of the last century (with the possible exception of Reith) could have imagined the vast enterprise that is the BBC in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It began in 1922 when the six biggest companies that had an interest in broadcasting, Marconi, Metropolitan-Vickers, The General Electric Company, the Radio Communication Company, the Western Electric Company, and the British Thomson-Houston Company agreed to form a partnership to be called The British Broadcasting Company. The nascent company, an unusual hybrid of commercial enterprise and public service, was capitalized with 100,000 GBP (approx, \$500,000) in ordinary shares, and further financed by an annual fee payable by anyone who bought a wireless set from one of the BBC companies licensed to make and market radio receivers. The annual fee of ten shillings (approx. \$1) was collected by the Post Office; the BBC received half the fee and the Post Office retained the balance. The fee was in lieu of on-air advertising which was widely deemed an “abhorrent” notion, but this alternative form of financing didn’t work very well for very long. The Post Office had difficulty keeping up with the demand for licenses, and many people had begun building their own receivers either out of frustration with the delay in obtaining a license, or to avoid paying the fee altogether (Briggs 1961).

In 1925 the government commissioned a committee to investigate the problem. The committee recommended the abolition of royalties from the sale of BBC receivers, and an increase in the BBC's share of the license fee from 50 to 75 percent. The committee also recommended that the license fee should apply to anyone with a wireless. Following the release of the committee's recommendations the universal license fee was signed into law. In 2008 this fee (GBP135 or \$270) remains the principal source of funding for the BBC.

### **Reith Takes Command**

In December 1923, John Charles Walsham Reith, formerly the general manager of an engineering firm in Glasgow, was appointed as the BBC's first General Manager with "full control of the company and its staff" (Street, 2002: 28). He was hired even though, as he noted in his diary, "I did not know what broadcasting was" (Reith 1949: 83)

Reith brought an austere, paternalistic philosophy to the BBC that had a profound influence on the actions and policies of the fledgling corporation for many years. As Briggs (1985) noted "He believed that he was called to the BBC...by Providence"(44). In an entry in his diary, Reith quoted a sentence from the Book of Psalms which had been his guiding principle up to that point, and which continued to ground his philosophy throughout his tenure at the BBC: "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him and He shall bring it to pass" (Reith 1949: 83).

Reith outlined his vision for the BBC, which was both high minded and ambitious, in a book titled *Broadcast Over Britain* (1924). He thought broadcasting should be primarily a public service which he felt would lead to, among many other improvements, a "more enlightened" electorate. As a deeply religious man who felt that one of the "most significant and unfortunate trends of modern life" was the secularization of Sunday, he

insisted that the BBC pay particular attention to religious programming. He also mandated that programming on Sunday would be distinct from that heard throughout the rest of the week; this alone, he felt, more than justified the BBC's monopoly (Stuart 1975).

His programming philosophy was grounded in his belief that the Sabbath should be "one day in the week clear of jazz and variety and such like; [in] an effort to preserve the inestimable benefit of a day different from other days (Reith 1949: 100). He also believed that broadcasting should be used for education, which he defined as "a systematic and sustained endeavor to re-create, to build up knowledge, experience and character, perhaps even in the face of obstacles" (Reith 1949: 103). He was equally convinced that the kind of programming he envisioned should be made available even if its recipients were not entirely convinced of its value. "It is occasionally indicated to us," he wrote, "that we are apparently setting out to give the public what we think they need—and not what they want, but few know what they want and very few know what they need....In any case it is better to overestimate the mentality of the public than to underestimate it" (quoted in Briggs 1985: 55).

Reith may have been somewhat high-handed in his approach to programming, but his insistence on the BBC's autonomy served to establish its independence. The infamous General Strike of 1926 was the first real test of that independence. He faced pressure from both the left (who accused the BBC of being nothing more than a mouthpiece for the government) and from the right (Winston Churchill advocated commandeering the BBC as a voice for government propaganda). Reith insisted that the BBC would remain, as much as possible, an objective and unbiased source of information during the strike,

and in the process he laid the groundwork for the BBC's widely recognized objectivity in its news reporting. During the strike radio was the only source for information. In a 1961 radio interview, Reith called the strike "a tremendous opportunity to show what broadcasting could do" (quoted in Briggs 1995: 109).

### **From Company to Corporation**

A year before the strike another government committee, known as the Crawford Committee, had begun making plans for the future of broadcasting in the U.K. In March, 1926 it published its report calling for a "single authority" to control broadcasting. The report recommended that the new organization should be run by "persons of judgment and independence, free of commitments..." In short, it should be a "Public Corporation acting as a Trustee for the national interest" (Street, 2002: 34).

In the summer of 1926, as Reith stood firm in his insistence that the BBC should remain an independent voice, many of the committee's recommendations, which vindicated Reith's position, were accepted by the government. The responsibility for broadcasting would be given over to the new organization to be called the British Broadcasting Corporation on December 31, 1926. The new authority would not "be a creature of Parliament and connected with political activity" but rather a publicly funded autonomous corporation subject to regulation and oversight by the government, but drawing its power from a Royal Charter. The Corporation was created for a period of 10 years beginning on January 1, 1927. The Charter stated that the BBC was to "collect news of and information relating to current events in any part of the world and in any manner that may be thought fit and to establish and subscribe to news-agencies" (quoted in Briggs, 1985: 94).

By November, 1932, 5 million people were listening BBC's broadcasts which were by then available in every area of the country. Radios were not cheap—prices ranged from 28 guineas (approx \$140)) for the top of the line Marconiphone 53 to between 5 and 6 GBP (approx. \$30) for the Philco “people's sets.” In 1922 the average annual wage was around 70 GBP (approx. \$350); by 1937 the average annual wage had dropped to around 38 GBP (\$185) (Street 2002).

The music on the station (until the Second World War the BBC was a single network) was a broad mix of classical music—often given prominence with symphony concerts regularly scheduled in prime time—dance music played by a range of big bands, and jazz (despite Reith's pronounced distaste for it). Reith's antipathy toward jazz was shared by many cultural leaders who were concerned with the “Americanization” (i.e. commercialization) that threatened refined European culture (Chapman 1992). This “classism” was a factor in programming decisions at the BBC until the Second World War, particularly when the programming reflected a so-called “minority music.” Only two programs in the 1930's programmed jazz. One was hosted by Christopher Stone whose style of presentation (“informal yet slightly diffident, even non-committal”) had the effect of distancing him from the music he played. The other show was hosted and produced by Leslie Perowne and his assistant, Charles Chilton. “Jim Godbolt, historian of British jazz, suggests that Perowne's espousal of jazz was taken seriously by the BBC only in deference to his upper-class upbringing (Barnard 1989: 13).

The network also presented original drama, classics by Shakespeare and other playwrights, adaptations of popular novels and music hall shows broadcast live from a BBC-owned theatre in London. By the late 1930's, rather than featuring established stars

the BBC had begun helping previously unknown performers to develop their reputations enabling them to attract audiences in theatres across the country as a result of their weekly exposure on the radio. This was a harbinger of the role Peel was to play 30 years later.

### **Empire Broadcasting**

In addition to the public service agenda he developed for the domestic audience, in 1932 Reith introduced the concept of broadcasting beyond the British Isles, of taking “British culture” directly to expatriates and locals alike scattered across the globe. All of its programs were in English until 1938 when the BBC began broadcasting foreign language programs on the World Service (Briggs 1985). A BBC report published in March 1937 made it quite clear that “to introduce a foreign language into the Empire Service would...inevitably prejudice the integrity of the service” (quoted in Briggs 1985: 138). The report could not have been more wrong. The service was and still is valued for the integrity of its independent news programming in countries where reliable information is not available on domestic stations. (Briggs 1985).

### **“An Instrument of the Well-To-Do”**

Critics of the BBC in the 1930s often complained that it was an institution programmed for a narrow demographic and that its attitude to the population at large was condescending. In 1936, an Independent Labor Party Member of Parliament (MP) for Glasgow complained that the BBC “appears to be run as though it were an instrument of the well-to-do. It is run largely by people who do not know the working class point of view, but who are seeking evidently to mould the working class” (quoted in Briggs 1985:



151). The criticism reflected an attitude that was to trouble the BBC for many years to come.

The BBC's perceived elitism was fostered in part by Reith's belief in a single British culture that was reflected in his insistence that all BBC announcers should use the pronunciation associated with the upper classes. In 1924, Reith wrote:

We have made a special effort to secure in our various stations men who, in the presentation of program items, the reading of news bulletins and so on, can be relied upon to employ the correct pronunciation of the English tongue.... (Reith 1924: 161).

Reith's conception of a single, correct form of pronunciation remained standard practice at the BBC until the late 1950s when such classist assumptions were slowly abandoned.

Interestingly, Hilda Matheson, the first head of the BBC's Talks Department which was responsible for hiring and training announcers, didn't share Reith's assumptions. She left the BBC in 1932. In *Broadcasting* (1933) she argued that "[T]here is no single pattern of Standard English that can be defined with complete phonetic exactitude....The nearest approach to a definition which would be at all widely accepted is that Standard English—in the academic sense—is roughly the educated speech of southern England" (66). The idea that everyone living outside of southern England should be expected to adopt this mode of speech was anathema not only to Matheson but also, she noted, to many people across the country who "regard southern English as a backboneless, affected and mincing form of speech....The BBC," she added, "has been accused of popularizing an effete, affected form of speech [and] 'Announcers' English' is in some quarters a term of disparagement (67).

W.A. Robson, a political scientist, hailed the BBC as “an invention in the sphere of social science no less remarkable than the invention of radio transmission in the sphere of natural science” (quoted in Briggs, 1985: 151). But the BBC, he said, “is almost overburdened with a sense of responsibility” (152). That sense of having to answer to everyone, said Robson, made the BBC too conservative in its programming and too “centralized” (i.e. London-based) in its attitude to the country. The BBC, he wrote, has “only the vaguest and most remote contact with listeners” (Briggs, 1985: 152).

The Second World War had something of a democratizing effect on the BBC. In 1940, the same year Peel was born, a second channel, the Forces Program, was introduced as a way of securing “the contentment and morale of the troops” stationed in France. In response to listener research, the new channel focused on popular music and comedy. The forces wanted a “light” program devoid of “heavy” music, religious programming, and drama. The programming on the new network proved very popular with the people at home as well, and attracted an audience that not only far outnumbered the intended military audience but also the audience for the programming on the other domestic network, now called the Home Service.

The presentation style on the Forces Program differed dramatically from that on the Home Service, as exemplified by a cartoon in the satirical magazine, *Punch*, from February, 1941. In the first frame of the cartoon a group of men are sitting listening to an announcer introducing an upcoming program on the Home Service: “We are now taking Regional listeners over to hear a talk on the larvae of the common logarithm; this will be followed by Precioso’s “Fugue No.6 in G (Op.28)” played by The Manchapean Ensemble...” In the second frame the same group of men is listening to an announcer on

the new Forces Program: “Hello, all you cheery chaps in the Forces—here’s a grand treat for you. Your old pal Billy Fungus is in the studio, and he’s going to sing you a song that is always a prime favorite with all you fighting lads, so mind you let yourselves go in the chorus...it is, ‘My girl’s got a pash for bangers and mash...’”(Briggs 1985: plate 10).

### **The Third Program**

Following the war, during Peel’s childhood, the BBC’s domestic programming was divided into three networks—the Home Service, the Light Program (replacing the Forces program), and the Third Program. William Haley, the new Director General appointed in the summer of 1943, had a clear vision for the future. Although still firmly rooted in Reith’s philosophy, it recognized its inherent limitations and sought to some degree to follow, as well as to lead, the audience.

According to Haley, the three stations “would be in competition with each other – with no centralized planning, but with a few ‘Queensbury rules’ and a high-powered Co-ordinating Committee to determine what constituted fair competition” (quoted in Briggs 1985: 244). The programming on each station remained a mix of music, plays and talks, but the development of public awareness of public affairs was still considered a priority. “Each program,” said Haley, “at any given moment had to be ahead of its public, but not so much as to lose their confidence.” Listeners before the war, said Haley, had been “plunged straight from popular to unpopular material, from highbrow to lowbrow and vice versa” in what he referred to as a “hot and cold process.” As a result, the BBC had gained a name for being didactic, arbitrary, and “something of a governess.” Haley hoped the new system would “lead the listener on (from the popular entertainment on the Light Program) to more serious things (on the Home Service and the Third Program)

through “curiosity, liking and a growth of understanding” —in, effect, moving listeners “up the cultural scale” (244).

The Light Program was a hybrid of the Forces Program’s populist programming and the “serious” programming that during the war had largely been reserved for the Home Service. The programming on the Third Program, introduced in September, 1946, according to Haley, was aimed at a “selective, not casual” audience that would be both “attentive and critical” (quoted in Briggs 1985: 250). The new networks unapologetically high-brow fare was not to everyone’s taste. The author and music critic, Edward Sackville-West, enthused that the new network might well become “the greatest educative and civilizing force England has known since the secularization of the theatre in the sixteenth century” (250). Evelyn Waugh was less enthusiastic. “I have listened attentively to all programs,” he wrote, “and nothing will confirm me more in my resolution to emigrate” (250). For most people a simpler option was to listen to another station, and in the late 1940’s the BBC’s monopoly was challenged for the first time by both the advent of television and commercial radio.

### **Competition and Rock and Roll**

Radio Luxembourg, a commercial station based in the Duchy of Luxembourg, which had been broadcasting since the early 1930’s, garnered a large audience by providing the kind of populist music programming the BBC had largely shunned, particularly on Sundays, which under Reith’s strict dictum was reserved for religious programming. The Duchy was occupied by the Germans during the war and the station was used to broadcast Nazi propaganda, but following the war it resumed broadcasting sponsored music programs that could be heard in the U.K. in the evening. In 1948 the

station began airing a show called *Top Twenty*. Hosted by Teddy Johnson, the show was the first “countdown” show focusing on the 20 top selling songs on sheet music.

Although not permitted to track the sales of records, it tracked sales of sheet music and played recorded versions of the songs. Johnson was initially skeptical that the program would attract an audience. I said, “That’s crazy. People are never going to listen to a program like that, because all they’ll be hearing will be the songs and the records that they’ve been hearing on every other program during the week on every other radio station. People will just not listen to that sort of program” (Street 2002: 92). The show, recorded in a London production house, was an enormous success, particularly with young listeners looking for programming that reflected their taste.

By the mid 1950s, despite a relatively weak signal that could not be heard in the U.K. until 7 pm, Radio Luxembourg was providing serious competition for the BBC. Luxembourg had the further advantage of not being subject to the Musician’s Union regulation that limited the number of hours that records could be played on the BBC. The restriction known as “needle time” allowed the BBC to play records for 27 hours out of a 280 hour radio week on the three networks. The restriction was the result of an agreement between the BBC and Phonographic Performance Limited (PPL) an organization formed in 1934 following a lawsuit brought by the Gramophone Company in the early 1930s. The suit charged that a restaurant using records instead of musicians was guilty of copyright infringement under the 1911 Copyright Act. The record company won the suit, and in 1934 PPL was created by the British Phonographic Industry (which represented all the major record manufacturers). The PPL issued licenses and collected royalties for all public performances of records. All of the monies collected went to the copyright holders,

the record companies. In 1935, following pressure from the Musicians Union, the companies agreed to give 20 per cent of the royalties collected to the musicians named on the label who were under contract to the record companies. The musicians themselves couldn't collect royalties for public performance of their recordings because the record companies held the copyright on the recordings. The agreement between the BBC and PPL to pay a royalty for every record played on the air was forged at a time when recordings weren't a significant part of the programming on the BBC, but the long term result of the agreement was that it surrendered a great deal of control over the use of records to an outside authority (PPL), and put the Musicians Union in a very powerful position within the BBC. It made it very difficult for the BBC to respond to the changing musical tastes following the war (Barnard 1989). However, one young BBC producer, who later produced Peel's program, found a way to turn the limitations imposed by the restriction into an asset. His innovations will be covered in more detail in Chapter Five.

Despite the growing popularity of the programming from Radio Luxembourg, the BBC, still very much a monopoly, at least in part because of the needletime restrictions appeared to be ignoring rock and roll. However, as noted earlier, the BBC also had a history of ignoring "specialist" music. The organization had also maintained a monopoly over television programming from its inception in 1946, but that monopoly was broken by the advent of commercial television. By 1955 commercial radio was making inroads into the BBC's radio audience, and commercial television had begun poaching its television audience which dropped to a low of just 28 percent of the audience in 1957, the BBC faced a dilemma. The governors still firmly believed, in the words of William Haley, that broadcasting should be used "as an educational medium and a means to raise the

public taste” (quoted in Briggs 1985: 260). However both commercial radio and television were proving to be a growing obstacle to its paternalistic mission

Concessions clearly had to be made to popular culture. Both BBC radio and television attempted to respond to the younger audience’s demand for programming that reflected its taste. The first (albeit short-lived) television program to feature rock and roll, *6.5 Special* swiftly became a program “about which older people were uneasy and younger people (were) enthusiastic” (Briggs 1985: 305). Produced by an American, Jack Good, it featured largely British rock-and-roll singers (its tiny budget rarely stretched to cover the fees for American stars) and served as the template for other popular music shows in the 1960s.

On radio, *Pick of the Pops*, a chart rundown show (similar to the Radio Luxembourg program), debuted in 1955, and *Saturday Club*, a two-hour program of the “best of today’s pop” was added in 1958. *Saturday Club* and, later, *Easy Beat*, a similar two hour show broadcast on Sunday mornings, got around the needle time restrictions by featuring “live” recordings of currently popular groups and singers made in the BBC’s studios. Outside of these shows the BBC did little to cater to the burgeoning audience for rock and roll.

The BBC was still slow to respond to the changes in popular culture in the 1960s despite the popularity of the offshore radio stations. At least part of the reason was again the BBC’s longstanding agreement with the Musician’s Union. However, the widely accepted notion that the popularity of the pirate stations, and their eventual demise, had a real impact on the BBC’s programming decisions has been called into question in recent scholarship. According to Barnard (1989), the government

[R]ecognizing the political advisability of setting up a service to replace the pirates, yet unwilling to embark on a wholesale reorganization of radio, ...proposed a dual response in its White Paper on broadcasting: the BBC was to allocate its 247 meters medium-wave frequency (at that time used by the Light Program) to a new daytime service offering ‘a continuous popular music program,’ and was to operate nine experimental local radio stations from funds provided by local authorities and organizations” (46).

Harold Wilson’s Labor (i.e. socialist) government was adamantly opposed to the introduction of commercial radio. In 1970 the Labor government, at least in part as a result of the closure of the offshore stations, lost the election to the Conservative party which immediately began making plans to introduce commercial radio. The first commercial station went on the air in London in 1973; it was not until 1992 that the U.K. had a national commercial network (Crisell 1997: 227).

Long before the advent of the offshore stations, the BBC had begun a de facto shift away from block programming toward generic broadcasting by splitting the original network into three networks focusing on popular entertainment, “serious” music, and talk following the war in 1946. But in the 1960s the management of the BBC used the issue of the popularity of the pirate stations’ “generic” broadcasting style to push forward plans for generic programming on at least three of the four of the newly proposed networks. In 1967, under the supervision of Frank Gillard, Director of Sound Broadcasting, BBC radio was broken into four networks, each with a separate identity: Radio One as a pseudo-pirate, pop based station; Radio Two as a successor, albeit slightly modified, to the Light Program, aimed at a broad “adult” audience with variety, light music and sport; Radio Three would continue the classical music based programming of the Third Program, and Radio Four remained the “speech based” network; Radio 4 was the only one of the four



to retain the block programming that had dominated the programming on all three networks prior to the shift (Barnard 1989).

Reflecting on the changes in the late 1960s, Lord Hill, the BBC's Chairman (1967-1972), saw the shift to generic broadcasting as inevitable.

The success of the music program (Radio Three) and Radio One suggested that the public wanted specialized rather than all-purpose channels. The old 'brow level' concept of Home, Light, and Third was outmoded. The public wanted to know where they could easily find the kind of program which fitted its mood or its age, pop, sweet or light music, serious music or speech (quoted in Barnard 1989: 47-50).

The offshore stations might not have directly influenced BBC policy, but according to Johnny Beerling, the producer for Radio One's first flagship morning show, it was the sound and programming of the offshore station, Radio London, that provided the model for Radio One (Beerling 2007).

As noted, Peel's style of presentation and the music he played was the antithesis of most of the programming on Radio London. From the outset he was regarded as an outsider on the new network despite his avowedly Reithian values as a broadcaster. His approach to his program on Radio One, summarized in a quote at the top of the page on his Radio One website as a mix of "things you like, and things we think you'll like," reflected Haley's modification of Reith's philosophy. It was less patrician, but the essential public service philosophy as espoused by Reith is essentially unchanged, and it proved to be the basis for his survival at the network.

In 1967, when Radio One first went on the air it devoted three hours a week to the kind of programming Peel espoused. It didn't expand the number of hours devoted to programming that didn't simply seek "to capitalize on the popularity of music" until 1970,

and even then the station tended to follow rather than lead. But, given that it was still interested in at least paying lip service to Reith's conception of radio as a tool for education, Peel's position was secure (Barnard 1989). However, had it not been for the efforts of producer, Bernie Andrews, it is unlikely Peel would have worked at the BBC for more than a few months. Their relationship and the programming innovations they introduced on Radio One are considered next.

## Chapter 5

### “Looking Over the Horizons of Pop”

I sort of managed to trick the BBC into actually booking [Peel], after they told me never to book him again after his first broadcast because they thought he was too boring. . . . [B]ut he was what I wanted. . . . After they said, ‘We don’t want him; don’t book him on the program’. . . . I said, ‘Well, I’ve already booked him.’ (Andrews 2007).

Despite Peel’s deeply held belief in the precepts of public service broadcasting pioneered by Reith, his tenure within the BBC would have ended almost before it began had it not been for the intercession of Bernie Andrews. As the producer for *Top Gear*, a weekly program that focused on, in the parlance of the BBC, the “sharp end of popular music,” he hired Peel as a co-presenter for the first program. Andrews supported Peel when many in the administration at Radio One were adamantly opposed to his continued employment following his first program.

This chapter is the first of three that address two of the research questions: how Peel developed and maintained the persona that helped him establish such a close rapport with several generations of listeners and how a rogue “outsider” like Peel managed to have such a lengthy and successful career within the BBC. The first is addressed through an analysis of the broadcast persona Peel was beginning to develop by the late 1960s and early 1970s. And the second involves Peel’s pivotal relationship with Andrews. Because Peel was only able to develop his on-air persona as a result of Andrews’ support and protection, discussion of the characteristics of Peel’s broadcast personality and his relationship with Andrews is presented in this chapter as part of the same narrative.

## Saturday Club

Andrews began his career with the BBC on the Light Program in 1958. He worked as a recording engineer and tape editor for *Saturday Club*, one of the few programs on the network devoted to pop music at the time. The show was a mix of records and performances by groups and singers recorded in the BBC's studios. As the engineer, Andrews was responsible for recording the sessions for inclusion on *Saturday Club*.

Early in 1963 Andrews was promoted to the position of producer on the *Saturday Club* sessions, and from that point on he had sole responsibility. British pop music was coming into its own, and Andrews was a fan (most of the engineers and producers at the time did not like pop music). One of the first sessions he produced on January 28, 1963 was also The Beatles' first for the program (Garner 1993: 31). As a producer he was something of a maverick, skirting the rules when he thought doing so would improve the recording. He ignored the Musicians Union's stipulation that the musicians be recorded in a single performance to one mono tape machine, and began making separate recordings of the vocals and the instruments and then combining the two recordings on a third machine. Andrews was doing his best to approximate the quality of the groups' commercial recordings. One major issue in trying to make credible recordings of "beat" groups was that, for him, the "beat" was virtually inaudible.

On one of my first sessions ever I said to the balance engineer, 'Can you put a mic on the bass drum?' He said, 'Well, can't you hear it?' I said, 'Well, I don't want to hear it, I want to *feel* it.' He looked at me as if I was stark raving mad. I said, 'No, put a mic nearer the bass drum, and another one on the side drum.' I wanted at least three mics on the drums. They'd think I was stark raving mad until I got...not more experienced engineers, but less experienced balance engineers who were more open-minded.

Those were the things we had to work with, I'm afraid, in the early days of pop music in the BBC. It was all very basic equipment. There was no such thing as EQ, or anything like that.... It was all very basic—both the equipment and the attitude of the people I was working with at the time (Andrews 2007).

In the end Andrews' passion and perfectionism caused him to lose his position on the program. After five years as an engineer and producer for the sessions, in April 1964 Andrews was given the opportunity to produce the entire program, alternating weeks with the show's original producer, Jimmy Grant, who had been promoted and no longer had the time to devote to the weekly show. For the weeks on when he was the producer, Andrews had carte blanche to book and record any groups he liked for the program's live sessions and to choose the records that were played. According to Brian Matthew, the program's host, "Bernie definitely became the supremo for a period, and the show changed noticeably" (quoted in Garner 1993: 32). Up to that point the program had featured a range of popular music reflecting the various styles (i.e. skiffle and trad jazz--peculiarly English versions of American blues and jazz) that had become popular in the wake of the first wave of rock and roll in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Andrews shifted the focus of the program toward such new and, for the time, radical groups as The Rolling Stones, The Kinks, Manfred Mann and The Animals, whose music was louder and more aggressive than the more adult- oriented popular music that had been the program's focus.

Audience ratings for the program increased dramatically from a weekly audience of three million "adults" in 1961 to an "adult" audience of nine million in 1964; if teenage listeners had been included in the audience figures (listeners under 17 were not

included in the ratings), they would have been much higher (Garner 1993: 35). But Grant was still producing the program on alternate Saturdays.

In April 1964, The Animals had recorded a version of the old American folk song “House of the Rising Sun.” They played the song as a slow blues lasting 4 ½ minutes, a much longer running time than any other pop song at the time. Even the group’s producer, Mickie Most, was skeptical about the song’s potential as a single, but since the group had been playing the arrangement every night on tour to an enthusiastic response from the audience he agreed to record it, and to release it as a single despite its length (Burdon 1986: 60-62). A week before the song was released as a single, Andrews had brought the group into the studio to record a version of the song for *Saturday Club*. Jimmy Grant was producing the show that week, and he cut the song from the show. Andrews was incensed, but Grant was adamant. He thought the song was too long and too slow, and he didn’t want it on the program. Andrews was very upset, not only because he felt the song was groundbreaking in its arrangement, but also because he had spent almost three hours with the group in the studio to get a good recording of it. “I told him what I thought about it, and he had me taken off the program,” said Andrews (2007). The ultimate irony is that in 2005 the song was voted one of the top-five UK singles of all time (Marshall, 2005).

Andrews was obviously a very shrewd producer, but his attitude made him a poor fit in a bureaucracy like the BBC. He was inclined to bend the rules if it suited his purpose, as he did when he hired Peel against the wishes of management. Just as in this instance he paid a price for doing so.

## Top Gear

John Peel always prided himself on maintaining an anti-establishment attitude and on his ability to back the underdog. He was anti-establishment because he knew how the establishment worked—he'd been part of it and he didn't like it (BBC 2005).

Shortly after he was taken off *Saturday Club*, Andrews was asked to produce a new program that would “reflect the group scene, a more progressive version of *Saturday Club*. In other words,” said Brian Matthew, who was again the host, “it didn't mix skiffle and trad jazz...it was pretty hard rock from the word go” (quoted in Garner 1993: 35). The show was called *Top Gear*, a name chosen from entries in an on-air competition to name the show. “Gear” was a popular Liverpudlian expression meaning “good” that had been popularized by the Beatles. They added “top” to create a play on words. The program was cancelled within a year, but returned on Radio One.

The new network went on the air on Saturday, September 30 1967. The following afternoon *Top Gear* made its debut as a three-hour program with Andrews again as the producer. He was given only very vague guidelines from the BBC management as to the content of the program. “The only brief that I was given (was) to look forward. As it was once put in the *Radio Times*, but it wasn't me that wrote it, (the show) was to ‘look over the horizons of pop’” (Andrews 2007) The first program, co-hosted by Peel and Pete Drummond, was a mix of records and live sessions produced and recorded for the program by Andrews. The groups featured on the first program exemplified its focus on the cutting edge rock that Peel had featured on *The Perfumed Garden*. Each session

included four songs which were separated on the tape and played like a record, one at a time, throughout the program.

Andrews had wanted to re-name the program suggesting it might be called “Your Mother Wouldn’t Like It” or “Granny Takes A Trip”, neither of which made the cut, and so the original name was retained. He didn’t really care, Andrews’ biggest concern was not the name of the show, but the host. He was determined that it was to be Peel who he regarded, after listening to him on *The Perfumed Garden*, as a kindred spirit. It was Clive Selwood, the London representative for the American label, Elektra, who introduced Peel to Andrews in the Summer of 1967. Selwood met Peel when he was working for Radio London. Many of the Elektra artists were acts Peel had championed in California. Selwood began giving him copies of new releases on the label because he was the only broadcaster at the time willing to listen to the records, and to play “those he liked” (Selwood 2007). The two became friends, and when Radio London closed down, Selwood introduced Peel to Bernie Andrews, “a fairly renegade young producer,” with whom Selwood was friendly.

I needed John to continue broadcasting just to get some records played. So, I made that introduction between him and Bernie. John was always a very strict vegetarian, and Bernie always remembers his first meeting with John. John was wearing rubber shoes and he had electrical flex in the laces instead of leather—one was red, and one was green; that was Bernie’s first meeting with John....He was a bit of an oddball, Bernie, but very, very, very nice man indeed (Selwood 2007).

Andrews and Peel were both mavericks about whom the BBC management had serious reservations. Andrews was, according to one of his annual personnel reports, “A complete fanatic about producing pop music.” The fact that he even liked the music was considered a liability, according to him (Andrews 2007). Peel has often voiced the same



complaint. “When Radio One started it was seen as rather a bad thing for DJs to be interested in music because then they would then want to become involved in putting together the program and this was very much the responsibility of the producer” (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 252). Within six months Peel and Andrews were collaborating on the program, but despite Andrews’ admiration for Peel as a broadcaster, it was inevitable that two people with such strong views would not always agree. In fact their relationship underscored why the management was reluctant to hire DJs who “liked music.”

He was (a kindred spirit) in a way. . . .I liked a lot of the stuff he was playing as well, but a lot of the things he was playing . . . .I thought was utter crap to be honest. And now, 40 years later, I will say quite openly that I thought...you know, Captain Beefheart, he used to drive me up the wall doing sessions with him. [Beefheart] was always out of his bloody head, stoned out of his head, mainly on acid, and it used to drive me up the wall trying to work with him. I recognized the fact that we were doing something different...and I let Peel go along with doing it because it got a pretty good reaction, not from the BBC, but from listeners. I held him back a bit on what he’d really like to have done because otherwise the program wouldn’t have lasted as long as it did because there was no way the BBC would have let him do what he’d have really liked to have done all the time in the early days of *Top Gear*. (Andrews 2007).

But for the first program, the best Andrews could do for Peel was to get him a slot as a co-presenter for one show. For one thing Peel’s style of announcing was a problem. Radio London’s slick, fast-talking transatlantic style was the model for the DJs on Radio One. Peel’s low-key drawl was the antithesis of what they had in mind. The feeling on the part of many in management was that, as the controller Robin Scott put it, “John was almost too much his own man to let loose” (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 218). Bringing Peel on as the program’s full-time host was not going to be easy.

The program's principal host, Pete Drummond, had also worked on Radio London. But his approach, like that of all the other DJs on the pirate station, was a Anglicized version of an American Top-40 radio DJs delivery, which only compounded the awkward chemistry between the two very nervous presenters on their first program together. Reflecting on that first program in his diary, Peel wrote:

Had an amusing rehearsal although Peter and I were both trying to cover our nervousness, nervousness, nervousness. At 1:15 we went and had lunch. I drank only coffee and was in an extreme nervous condition. On the air at 2:00 following Ed Stewart who sounded very shrill and panic stricken. Peter and I were a bit stiff though competent for the first half hour. After a news summary we settled down into a bit of a routine. It was by no means *Perfumed Garden*—I hope people will understand that that must come later. Had a few good lines I suppose. No big mistakes. It was certainly a strain on the nerves though...We tired out after 4:30 and struggled a bit to the close at 5:00...Robin Scott was there...I suddenly felt incredibly paranoid and just gathered my belongings and left. Walked down Regent Street and a bus driver yelled, 'Very good show, very good,' which was nice (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 219).

The BBC did not keep recordings of any of his programs, but fans recorded them off the air at the time they were broadcast and have since put copies of the recordings up on various sites on the Internet. All references to the content of his programs, both on the BBC and on Radio London, are only possible now because of the enthusiasm of his fans.

The tape of the first program reveals their apparent mutual discomfort with having someone else in the studio with them. Drummond's glib, upbeat approach sits awkwardly with Peel's brief, conversational anecdotes and wry low-key commentary.

For example, at one point Drummond introduced a song by Jefferson Airplane, one that Peel had played on *The Perfumed Garden*:

Drummond: "14 1/2...make that 15 minutes before 4 o'clock on *Top Gear*...and now a song from Jefferson Airplane from California, 'White Rabbit!'"

Peel: “Actually before MI5 transferred me from California, I attended the recording session at which this was made and so beautiful too. I’d like to play it (talking more quickly over the opening notes of the song) for a very special person this afternoon, the bailiff, who sits in the sitting room of Peel Acres twenty four hours a day.”

Drummond’s attitude is one of breezy professionalism. His approach, leading with the time and the name of the show, was exactly the standard music radio practice Peel had done his best to subvert on Radio London. On this program, as he did on Radio London, Peel maintained his idiosyncratic persona, undercutting his colleague’s glib professionalism with his informed insights and wry anecdotes that served to identify him as a knowledgeable, hip insider, but a pop music radio outsider.

Following Jefferson Airplane, they played a song by Traffic recorded for the program in the BBC’s studio. The song had been released as a single, but the version played on the program had a looser arrangement leaning toward jazz with an extended flute solo absent from the commercial recording. It is an early example of why many fans now hold the literally thousands of recordings made specifically for Peel’s programs, now routinely referred to as “Peel Sessions,” in such high esteem. For many then and now it is their only opportunity to hear the music played with the looseness and immediacy of a live performance.

The rapport between the two men, who clearly liked each other, continued to be stilted and awkward with Drummond appearing to defer to Peel. For example, following a song by Captain Beefheart and his Magic Band, introduced by Peel (for the first of many times on *Top Gear*) as “One of my favorite groups in the whole world of whom you’ve probably never heard...” Drummond is the first to speak. “Yellow Brick Road!”

by Captain Beefheart and his Magic Band. There's so many fabulous groups over there on the West Coast aren't there, John? They're doing so many different things."

Peel: There are, indeed. Beautiful groups, and they all have nice things to do, and none of them ever get heard, except, of course, on Top Gear!"  
Even when he is attempting to play the role of DJ/promoter his attitude and tone of voice imply a wry disconnection.

Drummond: Except, of course, on *Top Gear* (affecting a mock upper class accent). Right...well, uh...from the West Coast we're going somewhere else. I don't quite know where Big Maybelle comes from, actually. I should do, shouldn't I really?

Peel: You should, yes.

Drummond: If I was a good disc jockey (self mocking accent).

Peel: Which you're not, you see.

In print that reads like a rather naked attempt to take the program away from his friend and co-host, but on the tape the inflection in Peel's voice suggests someone teasing a friend by pointing out an uncomfortable truth of which they are both keenly aware. As if to underline that impression, Drummond's response to the jibe is a nervous giggle.

Peel (rescuing him): Shall we announce it to everybody after this record?

Drummond: Yeah, after this song, we'll ask her.

That exchange is clearly born of their mutual nervousness, but the next interaction between them does tend to underline the impression that Drummond was a bit out his depth with Peel.

Drummond: "We saw Skip Bifferty a few days ago. He'll be appearing live..."

Peel: "They..."

Drummond: "What?"

Peel: “They...They’re a group, you see. And very good, they are.

Drummond: “I said, ‘They,’ didn’t I?”

Peel: No, you said ‘he.’”

Drummond: Oh, all right. Well, let’s play the record.”

For Selwood, that Peel was so quick to correct his friend was not unusual.

John was pedantic so he would correct anybody that didn’t get the name of the band right. He was certainly pedantic. There’s a...to tell the truth...one of our famous television presenters...when John made a fairly disparaging remark about her television program, she wrote to him saying all sorts of things. Instead of responding, he just underlined all the grammatical and punctuation errors in red, and sent it back to her. He made no other comments (Selwood 2007).

For the show to work, Andrews knew it needed a host who was intimately familiar with the music. The glibly professional Drummond did not have Peel’s credibility.

But following that first program, Andrews was equally embarrassed for both of them.

[T]hey were both a bit scared of each other, in a way, because both of them would have liked to have done it as a permanent presenter. That first program...it was embarrassing to listen back to, actually, very embarrassing, not least for Peel, actually. Both of them were very nervous and aware of what they were trying to do, and it wasn’t easy for them. I wanted to get away from the usual sort of Top 40 type presentation that the BBC had been doing for the previous ten or twenty years, but at the same time, the whole lot was just ad-lib, none of it was scripted. So, until they actually got into a way of working it wasn’t easy for them (Andrews 2007).

It was equally difficult for Andrews. As the producer, he had to do his best to help the two DJs create the best program possible under the circumstances, even while his heart really wasn’t in it.

[It] was very difficult doing it with both of them. It was all down to the fact that Peel was the one that I wanted. The only way I was able to get

him accepted was to use him as a sort of second presenter to someone else until he got established, and recognized from listeners. After about six to eight weeks the response from listeners was so positive it didn't matter much because he got voted in polls and his popularity was enough for me to say, 'Look, I told you so. That's who I want, leave me alone and let me get on with working with Peel' But I had to use those first eight weeks with him working with other people that were more acceptable to Radio One's management (Andrews 2007).

Peel's low-key conversational approach which had proven to be so effective in creating a profound parasocial relationship with many of his listeners while he was on Radio London, worked equally well on Radio One. According to the results of an audience survey conducted a month after the station began broadcasting, a "sizeable minority" of the audience for the station who liked *Top Gear* thought Peel had a "good voice" and was "more sincere than the other DJs" (Garner 1993: 44). He had made quite an impression with only one show, but then it is likely that many listeners knew Peel from the Radio London program.

But following that first program he was still very much an outsider at Radio One. The first program might well have been his last had it not been for Andrews' subterfuge. As noted in the epigraph at the head of this chapter, Andrews, after being told by the manager of the Popular Music Department, Donald MacLean, not to contract with Peel for any more programs, told his boss that he had already asked him to co-host seven more programs. MacLean told him to cancel the booking, but Andrews told him he had a "verbal contract" with Peel's manager and he could not break it (Selwood 2007). Within a week the results of the audience survey were released and Peel was given a temporary reprieve.

Following the initial six week run of shows on which Drummond worked with different co-hosts, Andrews brought Peel back as a regular co-host with another former pirate DJ, Tommy Vance. Drummond stayed with the network for several more years before leaving in the early 1970s to pursue a career as a voice-over announcer. According to Andrews, “He’s done pretty well with voice-overs. He’s still doing a lot of work... he’s very adaptable” (Andrews 2007).

Tommy Vance, like Drummond, had the transatlantic accent and the glib, upbeat approach of a former pirate radio DJ. He had worked for two Top 40 stations in America in the mid-1960s, KOL in Seattle, and KHJ in Los Angeles, before joining Radio London in 1966. The two co-hosted the program for three months from November 19, 1967 until January 28, 1968. On the program that aired on Sunday February 4, 1968, following MacLean’s decision in December to let Andrews have his way, for the first time Peel was the program’s only host. The running time was cut to two hours, but Andrews was given a very generous 45 minutes of needletime (Andrews 2007).

Having achieved his goal of getting Peel as the presenter, it was, in some ways, a case of be careful what you wish for. Peel had a more radical vision for the program than Andrews. As noted earlier, the BBC employed producers to make all of the decisions as to the content of the program, the DJs were only expected to host the program. One former pirate DJ, David Symonds, who wanted to have the kind of input Andrews had given Peel, soon learned that that was not the way things worked at Radio One. He told an interviewer

Any BBC disc jockey only has limited influence. You can bring things to people’s attention, but you can’t force their hand. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn’t work, and sometimes there were unholy rows. But I

guess there has to be editorial control and that editorial control is not vested in the disc jockey. It's vested in the producer or higher up (quoted in Chapman 1992: 255).

But Andrews had made the decision to allow Peel to have input into the program's content. Peel had already developed a powerful persona, and Andrews, like many listeners to his Radio London program, had come to regard him as an authority whose judgment could be trusted. But working with a DJ in whom he had vested that much autonomy proved to be a somewhat jarring experience for Andrews.

I didn't normally (allow any input as to the content of the program) with the other presenters, it was only with Peel. That was the whole point of having Peel on there was to get his sort of music over. Whether I liked it or not, didn't matter. It was getting his presentation...because I was aware of what he was doing, and the fact that Country Joe and Fish and Canned Heat and things like that...I liked both of those bands, actually, and all of the records that he brought over from Los Angeles, really, which is where they were all based. I liked quite a lot of it. (But) some of it, I thought, was complete crap, quite frankly. Tiny Tim and all that. I think even he had to admit that it was crap eventually (Andrews 2007).

It is significant that Andrews refers to the music played on the program as "his (Peel's) sort of music." It serves to exemplify the fact that within a very short time Peel had managed to introduce a radically new approach into a segment of the programming on Radio London albeit, literally, under the cover of darkness, and that he had done so with such authority that his identity and that of the music he espoused had become synonymous. As a result, he had a significant role in the production of a program on one of the BBC's national networks. Within six months of being the sole host for the program, Peel began making it his own.

Introducing the program on August 11, 1968, Peel began by running down the list of people who had recorded sessions for the program—The John Dummer Blues Band,



Leonard Cohen, The Pink Floyd and Tim Rose. The first record on the program by Ray Stevens was called “Mr.Businessman.” Stevens, a successful professional songwriter was an unlikely choice for the program, as Peel noted following the record, but the song was a harsh critique of capitalism and he liked that. “That’s a rather splendid record; I hope you were listening to the words....” It was not *The Perfumed Garden*, but Peel was doing his best to maintain his role as a spokesperson for the counter culture. Talking about Stevens, Peel continued, “It’s difficult to imagine that he wrote that, you see. He also wrote “Ahab the A-rab,” and such atrocities as that, so it’s difficult to imagine...he’s obviously come a long way since then.” Peel’s comment that the writer “had come a long way” makes it clear where he stood in the culture wars of the 1960s, and why Bernie Andrews had been reluctant to give him too much control of the program. Peel held very radical views for the time, both politically and musically, and, as Andrews suggested, had he been given a free hand, as he had on *The Perfumed Garden*, the program would have been very short-lived. Reflecting on their somewhat fractious relationship as co-producers of the program more than forty years after the fact, Andrews still sounds a bit wounded at Peel’s apparent ingratitude for the protection he felt he was offering the radical DJ.

He was very unappreciative of the first two or three months of *Top Gear* where all of the stuff that he wanted in was completely alien to anything that had gone on in the BBC up to that point. I had to break things in a bit more gently than he would have liked because it would have been...I couldn’t just do a whole program of Captain Beefheart and stuff like that. If it was up to him the whole thing would have been completely...you know...the program wouldn’t have lasted five minutes if he’d been building it from the beginning. I had to compromise quite a lot on breaking that sort of program into Radio One. I had to tell him no, you can’t play four eight minute numbers from Captain Beefheart. Radio wasn’t the right medium at that time, especially medium wave mono radio...It would have been a terrible switch-off for a large percentage of the listeners when the program hadn’t been established long enough to do

that. I mean you had to think on behalf of listeners who weren't used to Peel at that time. The fact that a very small minority of people would have listened to it on Radio London, that wasn't the audience that was listening to *Top Gear*. In the early days, it was very difficult trying to get Peel to accept all that (Andrews 2007).

One of the abiding disagreements between the two involved a session Andrews recorded for the program with the Glaswegian pop singer Lulu. Andrews had booked the singer for the program at the suggestion of Donald MacLean. The management was still very leery of the program, and Andrews wanted to reassure them that he intended to be cooperative, but Peel was uncompromising.

I'd get it in the neck from management...one example, one of the first programs that [Peel] was on...I'd always want at least one girl singer and on one of the programs I'd put Lulu on. Now to him, Lulu was still a silly pop singer with a stupid name and all that bit, and he had nothing but contempt for Lulu. In actual fact she was quite a good little ballsy bluesy singer. The fact that she had a silly name I wasn't that bothered about that. She actually did a bloody good session. I needed someone like that as an example to break the program in, to make it more presentable and more acceptable to most of the listeners. But he...up to the day he died he was going on about me booking Lulu...he'd always go on about Lulu doing *Top Gear* as though it was the worst possible thing I could ever have done. I had people in my management that I had to appease to a certain extent, and I had him moaning at me from the other side saying why don't I do this and why don't I do that? (Andrews 2007).

Later in the program following a record by singer and songwriter Duncan Browne, Peel, apparently feeling the need to defend his taste in music, took issue with reviews of the singer's LP in the press. "I read some reviews of the LP, 'Give Me, Take You,' which said that the LP is 'pretentious,' which seems to be a new fashionable newspaper word for 'honest and sincere.' I don't know exactly what it means, I shall have to look it up, but I don't think it means what people think it means, if you know what I mean...." His sensitivity to the charge may well have stemmed in part from his having been accused of

the same thing in the satirical magazine *Private Eye*. They had reprinted a section of a review of a Pink Floyd concert he had written for one of the weekly music papers, *Disc and Music Echo*, in a section of the magazine called “Pseud’s Corner,” a feature designed to puncture the pomposity and pretension rife in the writing in the counter culture press at the time.

Peel’s description of the band’s playing was typical of his tendency at the time to at times overreach in an effort to translate his enthusiasm for the music into words.

There is a sense of control that wasn’t there a year ago and their playing runs riot across all imposed and restricting musical boundaries. At one moment they are laying surfaces of sound one upon another in symphonic thunder; at another, isolated melancholy sounds, which cross one another sounding like cries of dying galaxies lost in sheer corridors of time and space.

You can’t help but associate the Floyd with space travel, internal and external. Then in another instant they are a stampeding rock band and they are back in the room with you and your sweat is their sweat and that of everyone else under that glistening roof (Peel 1968: 10).

As he admitted on his Radio London program in talking about his initial reaction to *Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, Peel had a marked capacity for overstatement. The segment of the review quoted above is an example of his enthusiastic zealotry. He was passionately committed to promoting the music he enjoyed and that he felt should be in the mainstream of popular music taste. For listeners who were similarly disposed to his point of view (e.g. Bernie Andrews) it must have been very difficult to argue with him, even when his convictions were radical by contemporary standards.

By the time this program was broadcast late in the summer of 1968, Peel had been back in the UK for nearly two years. But he takes the time to tell his listeners a long and rambling story about a trip he took to Virginia following a song recorded for the program

by Tim Rose, a singer and songwriter from Roanoke, Virginia, suggesting that his knowledge of America and his insider's knowledge of American culture and geography was still resonant with his audience and a powerfully compelling component of his persona. He began

[T]hat's Tim Rose and "Roanoke." And at the other end of this Blue Ridge Pathway, or whatever it's called, from Roanoke, there's a place called The Luray Caverns, you see. For a while I was driving around America in a '58 Chevy...and for about six months, I was looking at things. I went into these caverns, and they have this sort of incredible organ thing where they have stopper things that hit stalactites and stalagmites, and they're all tuned. So, you know, with stereo you've got the two speakers, well, in this cavern each note came from a different part of this huge cavern as little hammers would trip and hit the stalactites and stalagmites. It was the most amazing musical thing I ever heard...you couldn't possibly get it on a record. I don't know why I'm telling you all this, but I thought you might like to know. It's a very beautiful thing, and I hope Tim Rose has been there. I expect he has.

His comments about the caverns are couched in the same sort of language he used on *The Perfumed Garden*. The tone of his voice and his delivery are also very much as they were on radio London. He had suggested in his diary entry (quoted earlier in the chapter) that *Top Gear* was not *The Perfumed Garden*, but that he intended to reintroduce on Radio One the ideas and the revision of music radio practices he had begun on radio London. He was never completely able to re-create *The Perfumed Garden's* freewheeling mix of music, poetry, listeners' letters and ideology on *Top Gear* where the focus of the program was very much on the music. But it is likely that his former Radio London audience recognized the constraints under which he was working at the BBC and saw him as their representative within the halls of the establishment. Certainly his comments between the records, and the music he was playing (much of it, As Andrews noted earlier, a "first" for the BBC) tended to reinforce that identity.

His comments in his introduction to the next record, by The Doors, in which he took issue with a journalist who criticized the band referring him to the sign above the door in every car on London's subway system "Please do not obstruct the doors, it causes delay and can be dangerous" serve to further illustrate the point. The remark, albeit memorable, is perhaps a little fatuous, but it speaks to his apparent perception that it was necessary to regularly remind his audience that although not everybody shared his enthusiasm for the music he played it wasn't because of the quality of the music, but because they didn't understand. It was the same approach he had used on Radio London, and while on Radio One he may have had only a measure of the freedom he'd had on the pirate station, he was nevertheless continuing to develop his persona as one who was at odds with the mainstream even while he was working for the BBC, an organization at the heart of the British establishment.

A little later in the program his remarks on a televised beauty contest served once again to underline his "outsider" status.

The other day I was watching television and...uh...one of the best things to watch on television are beauty contests, you know, because they are so *incredibly* funny...because all of the contestants look as if they stepped immediately out of an electricity showroom window, and they all have the same sort of candy floss (cotton candy) hairstyles, and everything. And I was watching *Miss United Kingdom* the other day and...um...I practically had to be helped from the room at the end of it all because it was so hysterically funny. But...uh...the woman who should have won it was Miss Central London, I thought she was the nicest, and she didn't even place. Whenever I vote for one of them, or think one of them should win, you know, they're usually ejected from the building right away. And so this is for Miss Central London, it's from John Mayall's "Bare Wires" LP, and this is called "Killing Time."

It is now a cliché to criticize the superficiality of beauty contests. It may well have been a cliché in the late 1960s, but Peel's remarks are not aimed at the beauty contest as

much as they are aimed at a culture that supported and celebrated the idea that a woman's physical appearance, particularly the highly stylized appearance of a beauty pageant contestant, should be the object of a competition. He further underlines how far his point of view is from the mainstream culture of the time by suggesting that even when he engaged with the contest and chose a "winner" his choice was not even close to that of the judges.

Following the song by John Mayall, and another from Tim Rose, he introduced a song by The Misunderstood, "I Can Take You To The Sun," reinforcing the impression that little by little he was doing his best to re-create *The Perfumed Garden* on the BBC. "This is, to my mind, the best popular record that's ever been recorded. Another sweeping statement...this was made about two years ago and it still sounds good. Some of you may recognize it" The last comment is clearly directed toward his Radio London listeners. He had regularly featured the group on *The Perfumed Garden*, which although it was short-lived had served to help him develop the persona and rapport with his audience that was still very much a part of his persona on Radio One. His other comment about it being "another sweeping statement" is an example of what Goffman calls "ironic disassociation" in which the DJ voices the response to his remarks his listeners are unable to make (Goffman 1981: 286).

### **Night Ride**

While he was constricted in his attempts to re-create *The Perfumed Garden* on *Top Gear*, that was not the case on a program the idea for which was developed by another BBC producer, John Muir, who, like Andrews, had liked Peel's Radio London program. Muir worked as a producer in the BBC's Recorded Programs Department (RPS)

and had discovered a huge collection of world music recordings in the BBC's archives. He had an idea for putting together a program featuring selections from the archive recordings (which were not affected by the needletime agreement) together with poetry and acoustic music.

One afternoon, after Radio One had been on the air for about a month, Muir ran into Clive Selwood. By that time, late in 1967, Selwood had begun representing Peel; “[We] (Selwood and his wife, Shurley) began to get a few calls about his appearances here and there, and we came to an arrangement. I don’t think it was ever formalized, really, but we agreed I would take care of that aspect of things” (Selwood 2007). He told Muir, “Peel thinks they’re going to sack him.” Doing his best for his client, he asked the young producer if he had anything for Peel. Muir immediately suggested that he would be just the person to host the program he had in mind. He told Selwood to ask Peel to submit a tape as a pilot for the program. He did, and for a time nothing more was said (Selwood 2007).

Muir had been producing programs for a late night series called *Night Ride*, but his contract was set to expire in March, 1968. So, late in December, 1967, he went to his boss to ask if anyone had listened to the tape Peel had submitted. He was told that the tape had been given to the controller, Robin Scott. Early in January, 1968, Scott told the Popular Music department, the office responsible for all the music programming on Radio One and Radio Two, that the Recorded Programs department had produced a pilot for “a *Perfumed Garden* type show, which I am considering for a late night slot” (quoted in Garner 1993: 48). Soon after that Peel and Muir were told to start producing an hour long show to air at midnight on Wednesday as part of the daily late night series, *Night*

*Ride*. Apart from sharing the name, Peel's *Night Ride* had little, if anything, in common with the rest of the week's programs which tended to feature music aimed at Radio Two's "adult" audience, the kind of music played on easy listening stations in the U.S. in that era. At that point, after 7 in the evening the same programming aired on Radio One and Radio Two.

The first show aired on Wednesday, March 6. Each week the show featured a poet reading live in the studio along with a pre-recorded session from an acoustic solo act or a duo which was usually taped on the Monday before the show every week. In addition to the live sessions the program featured a mix of commercial recordings, and recordings from the archive. In his introduction to the first program, Peel promised, "This is the first of a new series of programs on which you may hear just about anything" (BBC 2005). One of the first programs for which a tape exists was broadcast on May 1, 1968. The program opened with a song from The Misunderstood, playing their version of a Bo Diddley song, "Who Do You Love," a favorite of many blues bands in the 1960s. As with most of their recordings the principal point of interest is Glen Campbell's electric steel guitar played through an amplifier pushed to the limits of its capacity causing feedback that the guitarist manipulated, a la Jimi Hendrix, to create a combination of blue notes and pure white noise.

Following The Misunderstood, the program begins to sound even more like *The Perfumed Garden*, as Peel makes a reference to letters he had received from his listeners. One listener, Susan Hale, had created a loose knit group of people who listened to Peel's programs. She had developed a mailing list, based on the letters, apparently picking up on Peel's notion mentioned at the end of the final Radio London program, that people who



listened to the program should identify themselves to each other. Peel, like the listener who wrote to *Gandalf's Garden* (see Chapter Three), was quick to point out that the group wasn't a "fan club". As Peel explained :

Basically what it is...because I think fan clubs for disc jockeys are slightly ridiculous, you know, because what you really don't want is photographs of John Peel stepping on and off the tube (the subway), and this kind of thing. And...uh...so what happens to people who write letters? The letters are sent on to Susan Hale, and she puts them on this list, and all the people get together...it's not like a...sort of...uh...like pen pal things at all. Susan gets this list together and sends it out to everybody who's on the list, and they all get together and communicate. They've done some amazing things...five or six films have been made by people on the list. If you'd like to write to Susan, you can write to her at her address which is...in London. I'm not sure what part of London it is, but I'll tell you later if you're very good.

Peel's attitude toward his audience and the growing phenomenon of media created celebrity is exemplified by his ridicule of the idea of DJs sending listeners a photograph of themselves, which was fairly standard practice at Radio One at the time (Peel sent photographs of the morning DJ, Tony Blackburn, to his listeners, parodying the practice). That he gave a listener's address over the air might seem risky, particularly when it was a female listener, that he did so exemplifies his faith in his audience. He may have developed a parasocial relationship with many of his listeners, but unlike other personalities who developed a similar rapport with their audience (e.g. Dave Garroway in the United States), Peel seemed to genuinely regard his listeners as his friends. His insistence that his "celebrity" was merely a reflection of his listeners' passion for the music was an attempt to deflect the spotlight, but even while he denied it he used his celebrity not only to promote the music he enjoyed but also, in this period, to effect the development of a community founded on the values of the counter culture.

The music on this particular program was a wide ranging mix including a song, sung by a preacher from Mississippi, The Rev. A. Jackson, “God Don’t Like It.” It is essentially a fire and brimstone sermon on the evils of drinking moonshine on which Jackson accompanied himself on an acoustic guitar, using a slide in the manner of many early blues musicians. The rest of the music on the program was similarly far removed from anything heard on the radio in the U.K. at the time. The program also gave him the opportunity to invite poets into the studio to read their work, rather than reading it himself as he had done on *The Perfumed Garden*. On this program the featured poet was an Edinburgh-born poet, Alan Jackson. Following a reading from Jackson, Peel played a record by a group called The United States of America, commenting that they were “the first group that I know of who have combined what would be classified, I suppose, as ‘pop music’ with what would be classified as ‘electronic music.’ Very interesting sounds” (and a harbinger of the music he featured extensively on his program in the 1980s). He continued, “[T]his is called ‘The Cloud Song,’ which is taken from...inspired by Winnie The Pooh, one a great number of people inspired by Winnie The Pooh.” The reference to a children’s story is typical of the period. Peel was a proponent of the whimsicality and the cult of child-like innocence celebrated, à la Rousseau, by the hippie counter culture in the U.K. in the late 1960s. The format for the other *Night Ride* programs he produce, as evidenced by the tapes that are available on fans’ websites was an equally wide ranging mix of folk, rock, classical and world music, along with interviews, live acoustic performances largely by guitarists and singer-songwriters, and a featured poet reading his work on each program.

In the latter half of Peel's autobiography completed by his wife, Sheila, in the year following his death, she notes that the program was "as short-lived as it was inflammatory" (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 311). It was on the air for 18 months during which time it garnered more than its share of controversy largely as a result of three programs.

The first was broadcast on November 6, 1968. On the program Peel interviewed John Wells, a writer for the satirical weekly, *Private Eye*. He was responsible for a column called "Mrs. Wilson's Diary," in which he regularly lampooned Prime Minister Wilson. But that night he went a step farther accusing Wilson of ignoring a war in Nigeria because for him to show any interest "would lose him too many votes." Wilson apparently was listening and complained to the Director-General of the BBC, Sir Hugh Greene. The headline in *The Times* the following Monday read "BBC at fault over slur on Wilson" (*The Times* November 1968: 1). However, Peel was exonerated from responsibility for the remarks when a tape of the broadcast revealed that his contributions to the interview, according to Clive Selwood, had been nothing but "mmm's" and "aah's" (Selwood 2007). Selwood was much relieved. It was his impression that had Peel been found to have contributed to the slander the government was prepared to bring charges of sedition (i.e. less than treason, but a serious attack on the government's credibility) against him. Peel read a written BBC apology on the next program, and the issue appeared to have been resolved. Nevertheless the program was quickly falling out of favor with the management at the BBC. Its fate was sealed when a month later another feature on the program engendered a public complaint.

The program aired on December 12. The musicians on the program were John Martyn playing with flutist Harold McNair and guitarist John Renbourn with the singer Jacqui McShee. The featured poet was Christopher Logue, and it was he who was the first to introduce a note of controversy into the program. One of the poems he read was, Peel noted in his introduction, “one with which he’d had a certain amount of difficulty on television” the previous week. The poet said he hadn’t had “any difficulty with it. The difficulty,” he said, “was theirs, not mine. They didn’t want me to read it. They said it wasn’t suitable for 6 o’clock audiences, and so I didn’t read it.” The poem, titled “Castaway,” depicts a conversation between “a good looking youth from the suburbs” and a young woman who deflects his attempt at seduction by telling him “I cannot love you back / there is a boy who sleeps with me / he’s kind, he treats me well / ‘And so he should’ / ‘Please stop. How can I give you what I do not feel?’” It is perhaps an indication of the times that the poet was invited to read for a television audience at 6 o’clock in the evening at all. The poem didn’t provoke any criticism from the late-night *Night Ride* audience. However, later in the program, John Lennon and Yoko Ono, who were in the studio to talk about the release of their first album together, *Two Virgins*, played a cassette recording of their unborn baby’s heartbeat and that did prove to be controversial. A Baptist minister, The Rev. John Nicol, wrote to the BBC to complain that “it was in bad taste.” *The Times* ran a story under the headline Late night show ‘suggestive’ in which it said “[T]he BBC are to investigate a complaint of ‘suggestiveness’ in the radio program...” (*The Times* Dec.1968). Nothing else was ever mentioned about the incident.

But in April 1969, the program was moved to an earlier slot in the schedule at 8:15 on Wednesday evenings, a time when probably more people had a chance to hear it.

But Pete Ritzema, who had taken over production of the program from John Muir, saw it as a move to “kill” the program (quoted in Garner 1993: 50). Whether or not that was in fact the case was made irrelevant when a month later the program was yet again embroiled in a controversy, and this time for something Peel had said.

On the program, which aired on May 28, the music was a typically all embracing mix including a session from the American guitarist John Fahey, three pieces taken from the BBC archive, a recording of a piece written by the Czech composer Krzysztof Penderecki, and some rock music. The program also featured interviews with several in-studio guests which had become the norm for the program. Earlier interviewees had included Richard Neville, the Australian editor for the controversial counter culture magazine, *Oz*; a very young Richard Branson, still a university student at the time, and the Welsh cartoonist, Ralph Steadman, who later went on to create the surreal pen and ink illustrations that accompanied Hunter S. Thompson’s celebrated *gonzo* journalism in *Rolling Stone* magazine in the 1970s.

On this particular program one of the guests was Tony van Den Burgh, a producer for the BBC’s news and talk network Radio Four. He had been working with a team of reporters documenting the increasing incidence of venereal disease in the U.K. in the late 1960s. Peel began by asking Van den Burgh to summarize the content of the program. The producer talked about the increasing incidence of gonorrhea (noting that “seven out of ten American soldiers in Vietnam” had contracted the disease), but not syphilis, and what might be done to treat it. He then introduced the topic that was at the heart of the interview, and, ironically, at the heart of the controversy. He wondered aloud whether “we are getting rid of the stigma” attached to the disease. They talked about their

experiences at school where neither of them felt they had been given adequate information about the disease. At that point Peel, bemoaning his ignorance about the disease, talked about having contracted syphilis himself.

Peel: Yes, well, as we're...uh...being frankly honest, I contracted it (syphilis) myself at the beginning of this year for the first time. And...uh...I didn't...you know...I'm, what, 29, and I didn't really know what was happening either because at the school I went to, which was a very peculiar school at best, if you even mentioned the disease you would have been beaten which is a very curious attitude. But...uh...perhaps not as prevalent now..."

Van den Burgh asked him how he'd reacted toward having to go to a clinic for treatment. Peel told him he wasn't embarrassed, but rather "(which) sounds quite awful...amused" because many of the people entering the clinic were doing their best to "look desperately as if they were there as government inspectors just there, you know, to see how the service is running."

Van den Burgh concurred that attitudes were changing, albeit slowly, and that younger people were much less ashamed of having contracted their disease than their parent's generation had been. "A few years ago you wouldn't have got people to say, as you have said, 'I contracted this disease.' It was a silent thing...but now people are talking about it." That may have been true, but they weren't, at least up to that point, talking about it on the radio, at least not on the BBC. Robin Scott had been replaced as the controller for Radio One by Derek Chinnery, who, according to Bernie Andrews, was outraged by Peel's confession and the attendant publicity it received.

[He] once mentioned on one of his late night programs...that he'd had a venereal disease. There was a heck of a row over that. That was brought up at the next departmental meeting with Derek Chinnery, the Controller of Radio One, saying 'What on Earth is John Peel doing talking about VD?'

If he starts talking about things like that, he'll be talking about homosexuality next'.

Chinnery's attitude seemed antediluvian to Andrews, but was an accurate reflection of many people's attitude toward sexuality at the time (Sandbrook 2006: 466). In his autobiography, his wife recalled, "The BBC switchboard lit up in the traditional manner following John's confession." She added that the symptoms were recounted in his diary (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 229). His attitude during the interview, which lasted almost six minutes, more than enough time for them to fully investigate the topic, was largely one of concern over the fact that even then many people were still very reluctant to admit that they had contracted the disease and were equally reluctant to seek treatment. What Peel had clearly intended as a public service had seriously backfired and had served to cement the program's rapid demise.

The final program aired four months later on September 26 1969. For Andrews, the program's failure bore out his earlier contention that had he allowed Peel the freedom to follow his instincts, *Top Gear* would have had an equally short life.

Yeah, well, the producers on that...[Muir] was quite a junior producer, actually, and he was only there for a short time. I think he was on attachment from another department and they just sort of put him working with him. I think [Ritzema] the actual producer of that program didn't have a great deal of control over it. Peel more or less had his own way with a lot of the things. I got the impression that because he did get his own way that he put things in that...he had too much control over it, I think. He gave that impression, anyway. I didn't used to listen to it, quite frankly. I used to find it pretty boring a lot of it.

"A lot of the stuff," he said, "was the sort of things that I used to keep down to a minimum when I was doing *Top Gear*. He got away with it on *Night Ride*" (Andrews 2007). The program had been a well-intentioned attempt to reproduce on Radio One the

programming innovations Peel had introduced on *The Perfumed Garden*. But it was clear that the country was not ready for Peel's radical politics and his attitudes toward sexuality and other socially divisive issues. Peel had been free to espouse and promote some of the more radical ideas of the counter culture on Radio London largely because he was unsupervised and the station had little to lose at that point. But for the BBC it was an entirely different matter, and the management at Radio One saw the program as a liability. Had he used the program to showcase the work of poets along with the broad mix of music while avoiding politics and social commentary the program might well have prospered. The program on which the focus had remained primarily on an equally radical mix of music was doing very well. In fact, because of *Top Gear's* proven popularity his position on Radio One was relatively secure.

### **Best Disc Jockey and Top Radio Program**

At the point *Night Ride* was cancelled in the fall of 1969, *Top Gear* was a documented success. *Night Ride* had amassed a "cult audience," but *Top Gear* was attracting a sizeable audience every week. According to the BBC audience research department, the show was regularly drawing a weekly audience of 1.6 million listeners in the spring of 1968 (cited in Garner 1993: 50). In September 1968, the *Melody Maker*, a music weekly, published its first reader's poll since the inception of Radio One. Peel topped the poll as Best Disc Jockey and *Top Gear* was voted Top Radio Program. Radio One's management was taken by surprise. The radio One management had assumed that Tony Blackburn, the incessantly cheerful host of the daily morning show, would be the one to take the honor, but he came in second. "The idea that *Top Gear* is a minority program has been exploded," the paper enthused, betraying any sense of journalistic



objectivity in its coverage, which was hardly surprising in a paper devoted to the music Peel was playing (Garner 1993: 58). Peel, and Andrews' determined support for him, had been vindicated, and Peel's position on the station was stabilized. But for Andrews it marked the beginning of the end of his tenure as *Top Gear*'s guiding hand.

Once again the problem was Andrews' passion for the music, and his insistence that the recordings made in the BBC studios came as close as was possible to the sound of the commercial recordings made in much better equipped commercial studios where the artists, producers and engineers also had a great deal more time to perfect them. For Andrews that had meant spending a great deal of time in the studio working on the sessions for the program, a habit that meant he had little time for anything else at the network.

It was because I got the reputation for working in studios until about midnight and generally they thought...because the program was getting a lot of recognition in the trade papers and...got voted top radio show....The other thing that happened was that groups like The Beatles and The Stones and Pink Floyd and nearly all the top artists and bands, they would do sessions for me because I'd always promised them that it wouldn't do them any harm, and I would work with them. In other words, people would do sessions for me, and not, generally, for Radio One because they wouldn't know who was going to produce it, and they wouldn't get a guarantee and a balance engineer, and they knew if they did the session for me they'd be okay. That worked very much against me because it created a quite a lot of bad feeling with other producers who said, 'Why is it that The Beatles will work for Bernie Andrews, and not for others?' Instead of doing me good, it did me a lot of harm (Andrews 2007)

In 1964, long before he began working with Peel on *Top Gear*, Andrews had persuaded The Beatles to appear on the program. They had agreed because he had developed a friendship with them, but it his obsessive attention to detail in the studio had also played a part in persuading them to appear on the program.

I made an undertaking to the groups that if they did a session for me, I would take a lot of trouble over it, as much as I could, and get it how *they* wanted it. I'd make sure I'd get the right sort of studio...and the right engineer, who was sympathetic to that kind of music....It was the only way that we could get groups like The Beatles, The Rolling Stones...the people that didn't really need broadcast exposure, to be honest...because they were very particular, they didn't want to make a bad copy of their current record because it would have done it more harm than good. I used to give them a verbal undertaking that anything that they weren't happy with I wouldn't include in the program. I'd make sure it was okay. I was the first one to actually, once we'd done a recording, to get them up in the box (the recording booth) to let them hear it (Andrews 2007).

Bernie Andrews was always, first and foremost, a fan. But while that had worked in Peel's favor, for Andrews it had become a serious liability. Andrews began spending more and more time in the studio, first recording the session and then "mixing" the results for broadcast. His colleagues began asking why it was that Andrews was only responsible for one show a week while they were expected to produce their own programs and be available for day-today session work. Why, they wondered, was Andrews allowed to "waste BBC time?"

So, Donald McClean, who was the main departmental manager at the time in the BBC gave me an additional program, even though I was working over 70 hours a week on *Top Gear*. I got a memo saying that...to make up my time, so that I was doing as many programs as other producers, they gave me a *Music While You Work*. The rehearsals for that live program started at 7:30 in the morning for a 10 o'clock transmission. I said, 'I'm already working until midnight the night before.' I asked for it to be reconsidered because I was already doing enough, I thought. They said, 'No, do it.' I said, "Well, look if I do this I'm going to start by cutting the work I do on *Top Gear* down to the time that will still keep me within 42 hours a week. That would mean that I'd practically halve the time that I'd spend on *Top Gear* and, to me, as a producer, that would be unacceptable.... They said, 'Okay, if you don't like it, come off *Top Gear*.'

Andrews was dumbstruck. "That was like a knife right in the back" (Andrews 2007).

According to Selwood, Andrews "never recovered from that. I mean, he really, truly

never recovered” (Selwood 2007). He assumed that Peel would resign in protest, and when he didn’t Andrews was doubly heartbroken. He felt betrayed both by the management of the BBC who, in his mind clearly didn’t realize the value of his dedication, and by Peel, who he thought should have spoken up. “I got no support, at the time, from Peel because he wouldn’t speak up and he wouldn’t ...you know. He just kept quiet about it....”(Andrews 2007). Peel did speak out in the press. He told *Melody Maker*, “It seems a rotten thing to take Bernie off *Top Gear*. After all it was his program” (quoted in Garner 1993: 61).

It was many years before Andrews and Peel reconciled. Andrews believed that Peel had turned his back on him. Peel had hated to see him go, but apparently Andrews had never given him the opportunity to say so, and Peel could not see how his resignation would have made any difference (Selwood 2007).

It wasn’t until the early 1990’s that Peel had the opportunity to tell him how much he appreciated all he had done for him. Andrews had recorded a segment for the television program *This Is Your Life* on which Peel was the “victim,” a term used to describe the person whose life is catalogued on the program. Andrews told the story of the management’s reaction to Peel’s first broadcast, and how he had managed to get Peel back on the program. He’d never told Peel the story. “I thought it would have been very unprofessional of me to have said, ‘Look, the BBC don’t want you, but I do.’ It would have been abusing the position to rub it in” (Andrews 2007).

In the green room backstage after the show, Andrews was staggered to hear what Peel thought of him.

[T]here was a reception for everybody that was taking part in the program, and Peel's two sons, who I hadn't seen since they were young children, since they were babies more or less, about twenty years before. He called his two sons, William and Thomas, over and he said, 'I want you to meet Bernie. This is Bernie Andrews, who was a producer. I want you to know that if it wasn't for him you two wouldn't have gone to the schools you went to, and we wouldn't be living in the house we're living in.' This was all news to them, and they both gave me a great big hug to say, 'Thank you very much.' That was the first time Peel completely changed his attitude toward me...once he knew what had happened. After that he completely changed with me. This is long after I'd retired, actually. I'd been retired for about ten years then. It was all a bit too late, really. But it was after that that he wrote the thing about the forgotten heroes in *The Independent* (Andrews 2007).

Andrews continued to work for the BBC as a producer for another 15 years, but as Selwood, and others, have observed, he was never the same after his forced separation from *Top Gear*. "Being taken off *Top Gear* was like a bereavement for me" (Andrews 2007). He took an early retirement in 1983. Twenty four years later the feeling that he had been forced out still chafed. "Am I bitter? Yes, I bloody am (Andrews 2007)

Peel paid tribute to his friend and mentor in a piece that was part of a series called "Forgotten Heroes" in the newspaper *The Independent*.

When Radio One first started he brought me in to present the programme *Top Gear*. The management hated what we were doing and hated me in particular. Bernie really stuck his neck out to keep the show. We were meant to go and interview established pop stars and play mainstream pop music - but Bernie was anxious that we play stuff that would not otherwise be heard on the radio. We played music like Hendrix, Pink Floyd, and Cream - which was not mainstream at the time. And Bernie really stuck to his guns to produce a show that was not devoted to music already in the charts. He was eventually replaced by the producer John Walters, who did the programme for the next 20 years. But it was Bernie who started the ball rolling. Why is he overlooked? He is a chap who keeps himself to himself - he's a secretive sort of person - but when anybody listens to any music programmes on Radio One that are not devoted to the latest pop sensation, they have ultimately Bernie Andrews to thank for the fact that such programmes exist at all (Cripps 2004).

Andrews' dismissal from the program apparently came as bolt out of the blue for him, but he should have been expecting it; that he was not even looking for retribution for his actions perhaps explains why his tenure on the program was so limited, while that of his successor, a man with a very similar philosophy lasted for more than twenty years.

Andrews had managed to get around the rules and the personalities governing him for nearly two years, but it seems inevitable that there would come a time when management's patience with his inflexibility would run out. According to Lycett (2007), Andrews could not understand why he was denied absolute autonomy. He said, "I was given absolutely no respect whatsoever. I returned the general sentiment to them" (Andrews 2007). Andrews, as his comments about his approach to producing the program make clear, was an outsider. "I was a terrible headache for them to manage because I knew what I wanted to do, but they didn't understand what I was doing at all, they had no idea"(Andrews 2007). Peel made a similar comment about the management's attitude toward him and the program, but according to Lycett (2007) while the executives at Radio One could put another producer in place to control Peel, they had no choice but to sideline Andrews. Peel also understood, according to Harry Parker (2007), a BBC producer who sometimes sat in for Walters on the program, the art of compromise. According to Lycett (2007), Peel was not particularly politically astute, but he knew enough to leave the fighting to one who was, John Walters. Chosen to replace Andrews, Walters was, according to Lycett, even more demonstrative than Andrews in his defense of the program and of Peel's autonomy, but he was a more astute politician. According to Lycett:

[Walters] was a very querulous kind of person. But...he defended Peel's corner even harder, arguably, than Bernie did, and certainly more articulately because Walters was....Every so often the powers that be, not so much within Radio One, but the powers above Radio One, the Managing Director of Radio, would say, 'Hasn't Mr. Peel run his course? Is he really still at the cutting edge of music?' Of course, he was; and Walters would go in there like a blunderbuss and blow them all out of the water (Lycett 2007).

He and Peel worked together for more than twenty years before Walters retired in 1992.

Walters, a man "John didn't like...at all when they first met" (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 299) took over as producer of the program on April 27, 1969. Soon after they began working together, Peel recorded his impression of him in his diary:

I greeted his posting with the sort of enthusiasm that would have followed the news that King Herod had been chosen to supervise the creche. Very early in our working relationship I ventured the notion—on air—that clouds were, if you like, poems in the sky and he greeted this outbreak of loveliness with spluttering disbelief. Here, I felt, was a singularly crass man (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 300).

Despite Peel's initial antipathy to him, the two became very close friends. Walters' acerbic criticisms of Peel's more left-field ideas and flights of poetic whimsy served to ground Peel. As the quote above makes clear, Peel found Walters' sometimes abrasive dismissal of his more fanciful notions very difficult to accept at first, but as they got to know each other better, Walters began to have the kind of influence on Peel that Andrews wanted but was never able to achieve. Unlike Andrews, Walters did not defer to Peel, but rather served as a moderating influence, while at the same time a man equally invested in the most adventurous contemporary music for the program. The following chapter will examine the relationship between Peel and Walters in detail. In addition, the continuing evolution of his broadcast persona will be analyzed both in light of his relationship with

Walters and in his on-air presentation exemplified on recordings of his program from the late 1960s until the early 1990s when Walters was the producer.

## Chapter 6

### The Organ Grinder and His Monkey

Walters was famous for saying that the relationship between them was that of the organ grinder and his monkey, but each of them thought *he* was the organ grinder and the other one was the monkey (Selwood 2007).

#### Introduction

Building on the previous chapter's investigation of how Peel managed to maintain and develop his role as both an "insider" and an "outsider" at the BBC, this chapter examines Peel's 20-year relationship with John Walters, the producer who replaced Andrews in 1969. Where Andrews had an innately contentious personality, which regularly put him at odds with the administration, Walters was an articulate advocate who managed to defend Peel's idiosyncratic programming in the face of continued antipathy on the part of the network's management and made it possible for Peel to continue his ground-breaking programming into the 1990s.

The transition was not easy for Walters. As Peel noted (see Chapter Five), *Top Gear* was Andrews' program. When Walters was assigned to take over from Andrews as the program's producer he approached the assignment with some trepidation. He recognized Andrews' role in establishing the program, and Peel's role in developing it, but it is clear from his comments that the program's continuing success was a result of his ability to cope with the management at Radio One in a way that Andrews had been unable to manage over time.

Bernie could be a very awkward guy and didn't like to be told what was what. He would do things like not go to his annual interview. They could never get him in. The secretary to the Head of the Department would say: 'Can I make an appointment for next week?' and he would say 'Very busy



next week.’ So they would say, ‘OK, how about the following Monday morning then?’ Bernie would say, ‘I shall be very busy Sunday night and I won’t be in until Monday lunchtime.’ He would always make things less easy. He saw the Establishment as *them*. You talk to Bernie now and he would still be the same. And so he was ideal for Peel at the start; whereas I would not have gone that far at all. But Bernie finally got too awkward for them. They told him he would have to take on something else, and couldn’t just do this one program, spending all his time listening to records. Bernie would not accept that he had to do something else.... And that pushed them into making an example. They took him off his program and shoved him off to the World Service or something. I inherited his office, his secretary, and a certain amount of ill feeling (Chapman 1992: 269-70)

He may have inherited “a certain amount of ill feeling” initially, but it was largely Walters’ tenacious advocacy of Peel’s work on Radio One that enabled Peel to continue to develop a broadcast persona that reflected the changes in popular culture in the 1970s and 1980s. The sweeping changes that followed in the wake of the advent of punk in the mid-1970s could well have isolated Peel, as they did many of his colleagues at Radio One. But while Peel had been closely identified with the counter culture of the 1960s, his persona was one of an outsider whose sympathy was always with the musical underdog. As such his persona transcended any given era in popular culture; his passion was always for the music being made by and for marginalized youth. “I think, and *believe*, that it’s always been an interest in the music rather than any thoughts of any sort of career prospects that has motivated me” (Peel, Walters 1987: pt.2). In fact it was his clearly genuine enthusiasm for the music that gave him credibility even, much to his surprise, with the punks who were determined to sweep aside all of the music and musicians that had preceded them (Reynolds 2006: 195).

Punk was a reaction to the political and social turbulence in the UK in the mid-1970s, a period when many young people felt, as one punk anthem put it, that they had “no future.” Punk, which had its roots in American popular music from the mid 1960s, was founded in a nihilistic sensibility that captured the mood of frustration and boredom felt by the large numbers of unemployed teenagers in that period (Reynolds 2006: 22). Its impact on British popular culture in the mid-1970s was much more pervasive than in the United States where its influence on popular music was not widely apparent until the early 1990s.

In the UK punk was a subculture that divided the country in much the same way the hippies had divided it ten years before. The reaction to the music and the musicians mirrored the reaction to The Rolling Stones ten years earlier. For the most part people over 25 found the music unlistenable, and the people who listened to it were regarded as an unsavory element as the term “punk” implies. It mirrored the division between the young and the older generations engendered by the advent of rock and roll in the mid-1950s and again with the second wave of rock and roll groups, led by The Beatles, in the mid 1960s.

Peel once again found himself at odds with the majority of his colleagues over the music he was embracing and promoting. It was a pattern that would repeat throughout the rest of his career, and during the 1970s and 1980s it was largely Walters who defended Peel against the consternation of successive members of the Radio One management who could not understand why he was “still here” (Chapman 1992).

## Days of Future Passed

In the spring of 1969, when John Walters replaced Bernie Andrews as the producer for *Top Gear*, there were, as one writer put it, “weeds in the *Perfumed Garden*” (Miles 2006: 127); “flower power” was withering. Despite his umbrage at Walters’ response to his expression of his “beautiful thoughts” on the first program they did together in April, 1969, (see previous chapter), it was becoming increasingly difficult for Peel to believe in the ideas propagated in the “Summer of Love” two years before.

A year earlier, in the summer of 1968, he had attended one of a series of free concerts staged in Hyde Park. The concerts were organized by Blackhill Enterprises, a rock music management company formed by Peter Jenner and Andrew King. Among the groups represented by Jenner and King were Pink Floyd and Tyrannosaurus Rex, a particular favorite of Peel’s in the late 1960s (Miles 2006: 65).

In Peel’s review of the concert in his “Perfumed Garden” column for *International Times (IT)* it is clear that he was still committed to supporting the notion, espoused by The Beatles the previous summer, that “love is all you need,” despite growing skepticism on the part of many in the underground culture (Miles 2006: 130). His description of the concert suggests that the hippie ethic was still widely embraced, at least by the people at the concert in Hyde Park on that bright, sunny Saturday afternoon. Focusing on the performance by Tyrannosaurus Rex, he wrote:

Written on the wings of the weekend past which carried with it more love and more hope than I believed was possible. To hear them I lay, with friends, on the grass and searched through the sky with a kitten on my chest. You should try that sometime because the combination of Marc and Steve [Tyrannosaurus Rex], the love that was everywhere and not just

spoken of, the sun and the wind was more than my head can tell you. Looking up at the people drifting past, smiling, was a really wondrous thing. You looked as gods and goddesses must look...When it was officially ended (it's still going on inside me) people talked and laughed and played, Kings and Queens sang and rowed and loved one another" (Peel 1968: 6).

Peel continued to write for the paper until April, 1969. In a column in *IT* (February 14 1969), he was still writing about the power of love, but his frame of reference was narrower. His comments, focusing largely on letters he'd received, suggested that while little in his attitude had changed he was writing more about his own life than about the counter culture at large when he wrote:

The mail is so beautiful—concerned and loving. The country is full of friends and they smile at me each morning, early, from behind the grey clouds that the bewildered few shunt wildly about before the two eyes Hands reaching out of delayed envelopes to touch, caress and comfort. From behind imperial mad portraits, something of love. It is so much better and 'Hello' is a whole foundation.... (8).

In an issue published late in the previous summer, one of the *IT* editors, Miles, had written a full page article lamenting the "extreme lack of communication" in the underground community and, noting its increasingly fragmented foundation, suggested that "the fundamental basis for the Underground in Britain has never been established" (quoted in Miles 2005: 12). In his last column for the paper in April 1969, Peel's tone remained characteristically optimistic, while at the same time signaling his resignation that it was unlikely that the counter culture's optimistic ideals would ever be realized.

This column is a hand reaching out to touch you. It may not seem so but it is and always has been.  
Don't pull away.  
I love you (13).

For several months before the publication of his final column for the paper he had been concentrating more on his role as a music promoter and much less on his role as a spokesperson for the counter culture in a column for the music oriented weekly, *Disc and Music Echo*. His focus during this period is exemplified by a column dated May 2, 1970, in which he reviewed a series of concerts in London. Tyrannosaurus Rex was one of the acts performing that week. His comments on their performance reflect his growing sense of disaffection with the counter culture as represented by their music.

Tyrannosaurus Rex played well as usual, although, perhaps, slightly too long. It's better to leave people wanting more rather than less, and even I, the original T. Rex aficionado, found my attention wandering during "The Wizard." Most of the things they did are on "Beard of Stars," a superb LP by any standard (7).

He also expressed his distaste for the "show biz" that the counter culture had attempted to subvert. His attitude was one of a hippie appalled by the commercial aspects of pop culture. Describing an encounter with an agent representing the young American blues guitarist, Johnny Winter, one of the acts whose performance Peel had been given the job of introducing, he wrote:

Before Johnny Winter came on a little American came over and said, 'Hi, baby, are you the guy's gonna intro Johnny—groovy—well, here's what we want you to do, baby. We turn down the lights and you count to twenny (sic) real slow and hit your bit—go inna your thing baby—got it?' I had got it and after The Royal Albert Hall concerts of the previous week had had enough of it so when the lights went out, I shouted 'Johnny Winter,' the lights went on to an empty stage, and I went home feeling I had struck a small blow against 'show biz' and for music.... Often I wish I could tell audiences about some of the sickening things that go on backstage and perhaps they'd think again about their plaster idols. Ah well-- the courts are full of idealists (7).

He "signed" the piece, "Love, John Peel." But his comments reflected his growing disillusionment with the shift from the warm good natured hippie idealism of 1967 and

1968 back to the chillier, business-as-usual attitude he was increasingly forced to confront.

It was several years before he wrote another article for one of the counter culture papers. The article, titled “Days of Future Passed”, appeared in *Oz* in February, 1972. By that point he was resigned to the inevitability of the changes in the culture. He begins by looking back wistfully at the innocence of the “Summer of Love” and the naïve assumptions of the counter culture.

In those (1967) days “Underground” really was and a guy with long hair was a friend and you knew he was on your side. Trip to UFO in jokey kaftans made out of bedspreads with beads and bells swirling on the chest and love swirling in the heart until you thought you’d choke with joy... We sure were naïve but it felt a whole lot better that the weight of the wisdom we’ve acquired since.

Since then, the music has changed and lost a lot of its innocence. For a while we held the hustlers and gangsters at bay but now they’re back again—groovy gangsters who roll joints and wear shoulder length hair streaked and styled just so—but still gangsters.

Mind you we are a self-conscious and image conscious market and they aim a vast torrent of stuff at us until it threatens to swamp us... Images, the right revolutionary or mystical posture, the right clothes, hair, equipment, friends, producers—it’s all important. We’re terrible suckers for packaging and hype and the gangsters must piss themselves laughing at us for all our absurd pretensions. How long has it been since you felt really liberated, opened out, joy filled by a band playing for you? After several hours sitting on a grubby floor you may have jumped up and down with peace signs shouting ‘More’ a lot because, well, everybody does, don’t they? I often suspect that a lot of that is relief that it’s all over. (14).

His disillusionment was further fuelled by the breakdown of his friendship with Marc Bolan. The two had become friends after Bolan had written to him while he was working for Radio London. Throughout the late 1960s, whenever Peel was invited to appear at a university or a club, he would take Tyrannosaurus Rex, the duo formed by Marc Bolan with percussionist Steve Peregrine-Took, along with him. He would explain

to the apparently quizzical promoters that they were friends of his and asked if they could play a few songs (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 285). The songs were fanciful Tolkienesque tales of elves and wizards performed by Bolan sitting cross-legged on the stage with Peregrine-Took behind him (Paytress 2003: 35). Peel's patronage ensured them a steady flow of low paying jobs; he also persuaded Andrews to record them for a session on *Top Gear* late in 1967 before they had even released a record; this was the first of many sessions for Peel's programs featuring unsigned groups and singers (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 300).

Throughout the late 1960s Peel tirelessly championed Bolan's music, despite the generally negative response it received, particularly from his colleagues at Radio One where the attitude toward Bolan was exemplified by John Walters, who "sneered at Marc Bolan for singing like Larry the Lamb" (i.e. like "Lambchop," a squeaky-voiced puppet character), (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 300) and whose lyrics he regarded as "gibberish"; (Peel, Walters 1987: pt.3). In an interview with Walters, Peel conceded that he wasn't alone in his disapprobation of the duo.

You were not alone in thinking this. We used to go down and do gigs in places like Exeter, and this is before there were any motorways. They'd phone me and say, 'Look, we'd like you to come down and do a disco.' I'd say, "I will only do it if I can bring Tyrannosaurus Rex with me." And they'd say, 'Oh, what's that?' I'd explain, as much as one could. We'd hire a car and set off. All of our equipment in those days used to fit into the boot of a Mini which was rather impressive. And we'd turn up at the gig in Exeter and they'd, by and large, not go down terrifically well.... (Peel, Walters 1987: pt. 3).

The interview was part of a series of six programs, *Peeling Back The Years* that aired on Radio One in 1987. In the programs Walters talked to Peel about the evolution of his musical taste from the first records he bought as a child in the early 1950s up to that point

in the 1980s when he was widely recognized as having had a profound influence on popular music in the UK

Bolan was an example of what Peel referred to in the interviews as “extreme voices”—that is, singers with an unusual, and for Peel, compelling style. It began, he told Walters, with Lonnie Donegan in the 1950s.

I really liked what, to me, appeared to be a man slightly out of control, and I’ve always really liked...by and large it’s been the extreme voices that I’d like. All the way from Gene Vincent and Lonnie Donegan up to Mark Smith and people like Marc Bolan and Captain Beefheart in between. There’s always been those kind of highly identifiable, rather unhinged kinds of voices that I’ve found attractive (Peel, Walters 1987: pt.1)

His affection for Bolan, Beefheart, and other idiosyncratic vocalists was a hallmark of his programming that was frequently misunderstood particularly by his colleagues who could not understand his enthusiasm for often eccentric singers (e.g. Tiny Tim). But for Peel they were the essence of the liberation celebrated in rock and roll. For him the music was a means of escaping the dull conformism of life at Shrewsbury School in the 1950s. Rock and roll, particularly the “extreme voices,” represented for him a different world where he could let go of his natural inhibitions. He was too shy to do it himself, but he could affect his liberation through these “wild men of rock.”

By the early 1970s, Bolan having split with Peregrine-Took, was again fronting a conventional four piece rock band with the name abbreviated to the simpler, T-Rex. The lyrics of the band’s first hit single reflected Bolan’s fascination with fairytale imagery, but the music was rock and roll with a danceable back beat with Bolan, now the quintessential rock star, standing upfront with an electric guitar. In December, 1970, the band had a hit with “Ride a White Swan, which reached number two on the British



singles chart. Peel was elated. A few months later, the group had its first number one hit, “Hot Love.” By that point Bolan’s lyrics were much simpler, largely composed of easy to remember catch phrases. When he heard on the radio that the single had reached number one, Peel was overcome with emotion. His support of Bolan’s music had finally been vindicated. But by the end of 1971, Peel was beginning to lose his enthusiasm. T-Rex had released another single, “Get It On.” After playing it on *Top Gear*, Peel commented, “Well, that was called ‘Get It On,’ but I couldn’t wait to get it off” (quoted in Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 287). But, reflecting on his reaction to the record with Walters 15 years later, he had changed his mind.

Oddly enough, now I probably would [play it], but at the same time I quite like the idea that as you’re, as it were, educating yourself to the present and to the future, you’re also re-educating yourself as to your past. So a lot of the stuff I used to think was quite wonderful in the early ‘70s, now I find *crushingly* bad to the point where I can’t bear to have it played in my presence (Peel, Walters 1987: pt.3).

At the time Peel had assumed his friendship with Bolan was enough for the singer to overlook his criticism, but Bolan felt Peel “had breached...an unwritten code” (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 287). It was several years before the two men spoke again. As Andrews saw it, “they dropped each other” (Andrews 2007), but for Peel the split was a shock. In a note in his diary in 1972, he reiterated his distaste for “show biz” and its impact on the musicians who suddenly find themselves caught in the spotlight. “I was fond of old Marc, although I don’t care much for the current Marc who is causing riots wherever he goes....That, regrettably, is Show-Biz” (quoted in Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 288).

Reflecting on the loss of his friend in a column for *Sounds* following Bolan's death in a car crash in September, 1977, he wrote wistfully of their early friendship.

In the late 1960s Marc and June Child were as good friends as the Pig (his nickname for his wife, Sheila) and I had. We climbed Glastonbury Tor together, together advanced frankly potty theories about the origins of Stonehenge as we mooned about the famed site, did most of the things that flower children did together....Marc and Steve recorded several *Top Gear* sessions, and Marc and I spent too much time and too much money searching for old rock 'n' roll singles in junk shops in South London.... When he made the transition from bopping elf and hero of the flower-folk to fully fledged teen idol—a transition that he alone was able to make—he vanished out of my life too. I was sad then, as I am now, to see him go (quoted in Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 289-290).

It is particularly ironic that those “old rock ‘n’ roll singles” for which they searched so diligently helped Bolan craft the music that eventually separated them. With a few notable exceptions, Peel never befriended another musician whose music he loved and championed.

### **The Pig, “Petals,” and The Faces**

Looking back on the late 1960s, with John Walters in “Peeling Back The Years,” Peel detailed the moment when, as he put it, “all of the stars came into conjunction,” and he began to realize that many of the ideas he had held so dear had drained his life of the sense of joyous abandon that had drawn him to rock and roll when he was young. Sitting, alone, backstage before a concert by The Faces, with whom he became fast friends in spite of his experience with Bolan, he had a moment of epiphany.

I met them and you and my wife around the same time. All people with attitudes very different to mine—more realistic attitudes than I had—and I met The Faces backstage at a gig at Newcastle City hall. They had a dressing room and I was sitting—I didn't have a dressing room—and I was sitting in a phone booth backstage. I was sitting back thinking beautiful thoughts—I mean, genuinely thinking beautiful thoughts as far as I was capable of doing that—and they came and flung the door open

saying ‘Ello, John, mate, how’s it going, squire? Come on, let’s have a drink!’ I didn’t drink at the time at all, and as they went away my first reaction was, ‘Dear, oh dear. What dreadful rowdy people’...and I saw them disappear into their dressing room full of scantily clad women...and the sound of breaking glass, and curry being flung against the walls and so forth, and I thought to myself, ‘Actually these people are having a much better time than I am,’ you know (Peel, Walters 1987: pt.3)

His moment of “epiphany” may have come at the gig with The Faces, but the seeds for his disillusionment with the counter culture had already been sown. As he said Walters and Sheila, like The Faces, were much more down to earth than he was at the time. According to Selwood, Sheila had

[T]hat sort of down to earth Yorkshire thing. Walters was the same way. Walters was from the north of England too, and he was generally a bit more down to earth and so they’d both kind of anchored him and tended to ridicule some of his more fanciful notions. But that was ok; he’d just say they were wrong.

He may, as Selwood suggests, have ignored their dismissal of his “fanciful notions,” but Selwood was quick to agree that working with Walters, and living with Sheila, had saved Peel from himself. “Absolutely, yes. I don’t know what would’ve happened without them...” (Selwood 2007).

Peel met his wife, Sheila, in November, 1968. He nicknamed her “Pig” “because of her tendency to snort when she laughs” ((Peel,Ravenscroft 2005: 231). Sheila was not, as she put it, “the full-on, card carrying hippie that he evidently was”, but she had listened to *Top Gear* and liked the music he played on the program. And so, in spite of her “innate suspicion of hippies” she agreed to go on a date with him (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 210).

But the date ended almost before it began. He picked her up at 5 o’clock on that Saturday afternoon. She thought it was a strange time to begin a date but she went along

with him. But when he picked her up, he told her he hadn't been feeling well, and would she mind if they stopped at the doctor's office before going on to a movie. Their plans for an evening together were abruptly scotched when the doctor told him he had yellow jaundice and should go home to bed. Sheila asked him to take her home, but he persuaded her to return to his flat. "It wasn't," she later wrote, "the most conventional start to a romance," but she "was attracted to him from the start" and spent the rest of the evening nursing him. They became close "more quickly than we might otherwise have done because there was so much tenderness involved simply in me playing nursemaid to John" (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 216).

By the following spring they had moved in together despite her father's admonition that she should have nothing more to do with him. Peel had apparently mentioned the fact that he was married in an interview that was reprinted in the local paper, the *Telegraph and Argus*, in Bradford, her home town. Her father and mother read it, and they were horrified. Sheila's father wrote to her demanding that she break off the relationship. She didn't, but defying her parents was very difficult for her. "I don't have the letter anymore," she wrote "I couldn't bear to keep it" (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 225, 231).

In time her parents came to accept the couple, but even three years later, in 1972, when Peel was getting ready to tell Sheila's parents that he wanted to marry her, they were still apparently leery about the relationship. In a note in his diary, describing the meeting where he broke the news to them, the tension between them is palpable on the page.

Finally I said, ‘I think I better tell you that Sheila and I are planning to get married.’ At first neither of them reacted at all so I said it again and the Pig’s mother just said, ‘Are you?’ Eventually we settled down to discuss it and they were very amiable about it—as I’d forecast—with Mr.G(ilhooly) being a bit more flexible than Mrs...They were really quite nice about it—they admitted they’d been expecting it for some time anyway—but could hardly be expected to be bursting with glee and enthusiasm (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 321).

At first his relationship with Walters was not very amicable either. But, as Sheila noted in his autobiography, Walters may have been “exactly what John needed.”

According to Sheila, Walters “didn’t put up with any nonsense, he said whatever was on his mind, and was baldly disparaging about much of the music favored by John....”

Sheila was equally frank with him, and apparently he found it refreshing. “John said he prized me for telling him what a daft bugger he was, in the midst of all these ditsy girls with flowers in their hair who were hanging on his every pronouncement...I think he valued Walters for providing a similarly salty dose of reality” (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 300).

John “Petals” Walters was a graduate of Durham University where he’d majored in fine arts. After graduation he stayed in the area to teach fine art in a high school in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. He also played the trumpet in local bands. It was while he was playing with a local band that he met Alan Price, the organist with The Animals, who were based in Newcastle. Price was responsible for the group’s arrangement of “House of the Rising Sun” a big hit for the group both in the UK and the United States in 1964. Price stayed with the group for another year before leaving to form his own group, The Alan Price Set. He invited Walters to join the group, and in the two years he played with them they released five successful singles. One was a version of a song written by Randy

Newman, “Simon Smith and his Amazing Dancing Bear.” When the group went into a BBC studio to record a version of the song for airplay, Walters saw what looked to him to be a “nice cushy job.” According to Chris Lycett, a BBC producer who worked with both Walters and Peel, before becoming Johnny Beerling’s assistant at Radio One in 1990,

Walters said, ‘I looked through the window and there was a woman who was the producer.’ He said he watched her and she made the odd comment, but I mean in producing those kinds of session you were really like an administrator, you’d talk to them about what tracks they were going to do, you’d time it, you’d say whether it was bright, medium, or slow, and.... It wasn’t what you would call record production, far from it. So Walters looked through the glass and thought, ‘Hmmm, that seems like a nice cushy job.’ (Lycett 2007).

Walters joined Radio One in the fall of 1967; in April 1969 he took over from Andrews as the producer for *Top Gear*. Peel was upset by the change. He felt the BBC had given Andrews a raw deal, and he didn’t like what he perceived as Walters’ abrasive attitude. However, when he discovered they shared a sense of humor, he began to change his mind.

When Peel and Andrews had worked together on the show, frequently in Andrews’ London apartment where Peel sometimes spent the night, their attitude was very serious, almost obsessive. “There wasn’t much laughter when John and Bernie got together,” according to Sheila, who sometimes accompanied Peel to Andrews’ apartment. She got the impression that Andrews’ didn’t really want her there because he was only interested in talking about the program. (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 300). Her relationship with Walters and his wife, Helen, was very different, and she and Peel frequently socialized with them in the early 1970s.

As far as the music on the program was concerned, Walters' didn't have any immediately discernable impact. Walters' characterization of their working relationship was typically pithy. Working with Peel, he said, "[is] a bit like having a dog on a lead, and you're taking it out for a musical walk and you just make sure it doesn't cock its leg up against any one musical lamp post for too long a time" (Lycett 2007). Lycett stood in for John Walters as producer on the program when Walters was on vacation; and for two years in the early 1980s he was the program's principal producer. Like Walters, his perception of the job was that it was largely administrative.

Peel was an avid consumer of new music. I mean, we all used to have mail boxes and they'd all be overflowing, but Peel's more than anybody else's because, of course, he used to solicit them, and he would never, ever not empty it.....it was that constant searching, hoping to find something new, something that would stimulate him, something that engaged him. He might have a pile of unlistened to stuff but he'd open more stuff to make sure that there wasn't something else...so anyway, Peel would come in with his list. Peel would have his playlist that would just roll on and on and things would get dropped off it by common consent.... 'That seems to have run its course....' Walters had slightly more input, and I would occasionally hear a record and say, 'Have you heard that?' It would be remarkable if Peel hadn't heard it and taken a view on it.....in terms of the records played, I would say...a good 80 to 90 per cent of those were Peel's. I mean if it was something I thought he was totally off the rails about I would say, 'I don't get that.' He might play it once, and then he would say, 'Oh, you were right, Lycett.' On sessions, we'd have a bit more discussion about that, and maybe go and see bands together. Or Peel would come back having seen somebody and I'd say, 'Well, let's get them in.' As the producer I would book the session, and do all the administration, and probably go down and produce the session, although that wasn't necessarily the case (Lycett 2007).

For his part, Peel's principal concern was that Walters would stay out of the studio while he was presenting the program. Initially Walters had thought it necessary to hover over Peel while he was working, a tendency he found particularly irritating. But once Walters understood that Peel worked best when he was left alone, the two settled

into a routine that worked well for both of them. In fact, by the early 1980s, when Peel was on the air four nights a week, “Walters sometimes didn’t even come in; he just stay at home and phone John during the show to check everything was going smoothly,” according to Sheila, “which was just what John wanted—a producer who would help organize the show, booking bands for sessions and whittling down John’s lists of records to provide a running order, but who knew when to be hands-off when that was required” (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 301). Nevertheless, according to Peel, Walters’ contributions to the program were invaluable.

Much of the credit I’ve gotten for our stuff on Radio One was as much Walters as it was me, if not more so. He was as excited by punk ... at a time when Radio One was perhaps at its most conservative, and when we went out to hear punk bands he was as enthusiastic as I was to play them. He also heard people like The Smiths before I did because he went out to a lot of gigs while I was staying inside doing radio programs (Peel 2001).

Off the air, as they slowly bonded, the two men began to gain a reputation as an excellent double act, each striving to top the other.

They were two of the funniest, most amusing people I’ve ever met in my life.... They were so quick and fast. I’d go into a meeting with them and I’d be aching with laughter....I’d been absolutely in hysterics, falling about because they made points off each other all the time. It was just hilarious (Selwood 2007).

In the early 1970s, before they were married Peel and Sheila lived in an apartment in London. Walters and his wife lived in a London suburb, and the four often socialized together. At that time, when Britain had but three television channels, and long before video cassette recorders, the opportunity to watch a movie on the television was a rare treat. For a time the two couples took it in turns to prepare a meal for the others every Saturday evening with the stipulation that whatever they served had to be in some way



related to the movie that was being shown on the television that night. On one particular evening at the Walters' apartment, the movie was *Ice Cold in Alex*, a film set in the North African desert during World War Two. In order to create an appropriate setting for the film, Walters had turned up the heat in their apartment. The meal they served was a "viciously spicy vegetable curry that left us gasping for a drink." Beer wasn't an option at that point because, remaining faithful to the film, it was agreed that nobody would have one until the point in the film when the film's star, John Mills, after days in the desert is finally given a beer to quench his thirst. Abiding by the rules, but desperate for a drink, Peel asked if he could have a glass of water.

'Sure,' said Walters, 'help yourself.' John rushed to the sink, turned on the tap, held out his glass expectantly and waited. And waited. Walters and Helen began chuckling to themselves, which was when we realized that our hosts for the evening had become our tormentors: they'd turned off the water supply (Walters, quoted in Garfield 1998: 266; Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 303).

While as noted earlier, it was Peel's vision that anchored the musical content of the program even when he was working with Andrews, he was open to suggestions, but it was difficult for anyone to stay ahead of him. According to Selwood, it wasn't long after the two began working together that Andrews began to increasingly defer to Peel. He worked jointly with Bernie Andrews at first, but then slowly Bernie realized that John had a much broader knowledge of what was happening and so Bernie loosened those reins and John took over the program completely (Selwood 2007).

Like Andrews, Walters also developed a deep respect for Peel's instincts on the music.

Peel was like a water diviner, walking across a field with a stick. Suddenly-boing!-he'd say, 'It's here,' and then I'd have to get the spade out and make it happen....I think that a very strong case could be made for John Peel being the single most important person in the history of British

rock music. People say, ‘Oh, what about Lennon?’ but I think it holds true over the years (quoted in Garfield 1999: 259).

In addition to Walters, Peel had another champion within the management at Radio One. Teddy Warrick. When the BBC was reorganized in the early 1970s, Radio One and Radio Two were separated. The producers were given the option of working for Radio One or Radio Two, and the management of Radio One was divided between three executive producers who answered to the controller (Garner 2007: 68). Warrick was given responsibility for, as he put it, “the sharper end” of the music programming on the network. Peel called Warrick a “heroic figure to whom I owe a great deal” (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 302). As their boss he was the one to sign off on the autonomy Walters afforded Peel. Talking to a reporter about Warwick in 1998, Peel explained that it was Warrick, along with Walters, who “presented my case very persuasively in management meetings for many years” (Garfield 1999: 257).

### **Peel’s Champions**

From the outset, as exemplified by Scott’s comment that Peel “was almost too much his own man to let loose” (Peel/Ravenscroft, 218), his relationship with the management of Radio One was often fractious. An early encounter with Douglas Muggeridge, who replaced Robin Scott as controller of Radio One and Radio Two in 1968, exemplified the attitude of the BBC both toward Peel and to Radio One. The job of controller for the new network was “not seen,” Peel told an interviewer, “as a terrifically significant job, but something you would drift into in the twilight of a rather undistinguished career” (quoted in Garfield 1999: 13). The senior management at the BBC, represented by Lord Hill, Chairman of the BBC from 1967-1972, had little use for

the programming on the new network. Talking about Radio One soon after its launch in 1967, he said, “We had to make an appeal to the young, however little the stuff appeals to us personally” (quoted in Barnard 1989: 51).

Peel’s first meeting with Muggeridge began badly, which is hardly surprising given that the senior management at the time saw him, as he put it, “as being the Baader Meinhof Gang of British Broadcasting,” and consequently, as someone they approached with “a certain amount of terror” (quoted in Garfield 1998: 14). When he was summoned to meet with Muggeridge in 1968, Peel’s attitude was that of an errant schoolboy called into the principal’s office. Describing their initial encounter, Peel noted that Muggeridge appeared to be approaching the meeting with equal distaste and trepidation. “I think he thought I would do something unpredictable and startling, like rub heroin into the roots of his hair.” (quoted in Garfield 1999: 14). In the course of the conversation they touched on the subject of public schools. Muggeridge had attended Shrewsbury, but it had never occurred to him that Peel, a long-haired, bearded hippie, could possibly have done the same. When Peel told him he had, his attitude toward Peel toward Peel changed markedly.

He went, ‘Extraordinary! Which one?’  
He was assuming it was some minor public school somewhere on the south coast. I said, ‘Shrewsbury.’  
He said, ‘Good heavens!’ At this stage he was getting quite elated. ‘What house were you in?’  
I told him, and he said, ‘How’s old Brookie?’

For Peel, “It was clear that he thought, whatever he looks like, and whatever sort of unspeakable music he plays on the radio, he is still one of us” (14).

From Peel’s perspective it was a propitious connection, one that in his mind helped cement his tenuous position with the corporation, but in fact he was regularly

under fire from each successive administration, few of whom understood what he was doing. He had an ally in Teddy Warrick, but throughout the time they worked together, it was Walters as much as anybody who argued for him. They may have been, as Clive Selwood put it, “totally different...strong characters....” But, said Selwood, they each “respected the differences” in the other, and while Walters didn’t really influence John musically, and at times only “tolerated bands he didn’t like because he respected John’s opinion,” it was Walters who “protected his back all the time,” arguing forcefully for Peel’s continued tenure (Selwood 2007). “Walters was a tenacious bugger,” said Lycett. “He was a very querulous kind of person...[who] defended Peel’s corner even harder, arguably, than Bernie did, and certainly more articulately (Lycett 2007).

Peel echoed their assessment in a piece he wrote about Walters in the *Radio Times*:

When I first met him I was a rather priggish chap convinced that I knew the answer to everything, and that what I believed to be true actually was true. He was a more broad minded man than that, I think. He was also a very skillful debater so whenever we got into any problems with the program he was always very good at talking our way out of those things (Peel 2001).

For his part, Walters did not find dealing with the Radio One management much of a challenge.

The management weren’t the brightest or the best. I used to feel that even if I was wrong, even if what I was saying was crap, that I could still beat them in an argument. If I was defending the Yorkshire Ripper I’d still get him off as far as they were concerned (quoted in Garfield 1998: 11).

### **“Pop a Top”**

It wasn’t only the BBC management that at times took issue with Peel’s programming; from time to time he also found himself at odds with his audience. The first time it happened was in 1969 when he began playing a record by a Jamaican singer,

Andy Capp, called “Pop a Top.” For many listeners in his largely hippie audience at the time, playing reggae was tantamount to sleeping with the enemy. But Peel was unmoved, for him music always trumped ideology. But, as told Walters in *Peeling Back the Years*, he understood why many of his listeners had reacted so negatively to the music. “The most obvious listeners to reggae were the skinheads who were lying in wait in the tube station to beat the fire out of us old hippies as we wandered through there” (Peel, Walters 1987: Pt. 3) When Walters asked him to elaborate on his comment about the music being so identified with the skinhead sub culture, he reiterated that, for him, the music was all that mattered.

The people who would be lying in wait in the Notting Hill Gate tube station were skinheads, and reggae was their music. Also most of the records...I got very few of the records at the time, didn't know where to get them, and any records that we DJs were sent were ones that had strings added and so forth in order to make them acceptable to a wider European audience, They really didn't interest me at all. But then I heard a record called ‘Pop a Top’ by Andy Capp. I remember taking it home and playing it to my wife, and we both thought ‘This is such a wonderful record.’ I played it on the radio and the response was not very positive. People wrote in letters of the ‘Why have you turned your back on us after all these years?’ variety because people saw this as being the enemy’s music being played in their sacrosanct area (Peel Walters 1987: pt.3).

The apparent disjunct between his embrace of music that many in his audience didn't like and the fact that from 1968 on he was a consistent winner in the music papers' annual popularity polls was a paradox that confounded him. In the early 1970s the so-called “progressive” groups like Yes and Emerson, Lake & Palmer (ELP) regularly topped the music papers' polls, but Peel was on record as having no time for their music. Following an early performance by ELP, Peel's comment that the group was “a waste of talent and electricity” (Jones, 2007) exemplified his attitude. Talking about the apparent

contradiction between the music he played on his program and his position in the polls with John Walters, he conceded he was at a loss to explain the apparent contradiction.

It's always a complete mystery to me.... You'd have thought that the people who voted for all that stuff would have voted for *anybody* rather than me, but perhaps they were doing what I myself might have done at one time which is to vote for me as quite a good thing, that is they quite liked the idea of it, but actually didn't listen to the programs at all. I mean, they *couldn't* have done to have... voted for all those people—people like Yes and ELP and so forth (Peel, Walters 1987: pt.3).

His comments are, in effect, a statement of support for the Reithian values that were at the foundation of his philosophy of broadcasting. In effect, he was saying that he did not expect his audience always to agree with him, or even to like what he was playing, but he did expect them to support the idea that he should be given the freedom to broadcast the music he liked and to air his criticisms of the music, albeit music that had proven popularity, on Radio One. It is a point of view that any commercial broadcaster would find insupportable, but it is at the heart of the concept of public service broadcasting as articulated by John Reith.

In the first half of the 1970s he had occasionally found new music that he particularly enjoyed. He had given Mike Oldfield's "Tubular Bells," an album length composition, its first airplay in the spring of 1973, breaking a BBC rule that no record longer than four minutes would be given any airplay (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 297). He had also championed music by a number of German bands whose music could be called "progressive"—it was similar to the music he had so passionately embraced a few years before by Pink Floyd. The difference between the "progressive" music played by the German groups and that of the English groups, he explained to John Walters, was that the

German groups like Neu, made an attempt to reduce the music to its essence rather than increasing its complexity.

I think that Neu... I was listening to the first couple of Pink Floyd LP's last weekend, and...things like 'Set The Controls for the Heart of the Sun' I still quite like to hear from time to time. Bands like Neu, and then a few years later, Tangerine Dream, seemed to be taking that kind of spirit perhaps a little further and stripping it down rather than adding anything to it. The tendency on the part of other people was to add more stuff to it and making it more cumbersome and top heavy, and generally embarrassing. So it was perhaps looking for a distillation.... (Peel,Walters 1987: pt.3).

The reference to the music being “stripped down” is particularly pertinent to any attempt to understand Peel’s taste in music and why he was so passionate in his embrace of the music of one group, while being equally withering in his dismissal of another whose music, on the face of it, might seem very similar. Why, for instance, did he embrace much of the music by musicians whose work is often referred to as “arty” (i.e. Roxy Music and Mike Oldfield) while at the same time dismissing the music often called “art rock” or “progressive rock”? His taste is exemplified by his affection for the unpretentious, elemental rock and roll played by The Faces in the early 1970s, a group, as mentioned earlier whose “anything for a laugh” philosophy had initially given Peel pause. But their music, he told Walters “recaptured the feeling I’d had when I first heard Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis” (Peel, Walters 1987: pt.3). It was a harbinger of his response to punk a few years later which came at a time when he was beginning to feel particularly dispirited about the music. In an entry in his diary from August, 1975, he complained, “The pile of records I’ve ploughed through this week is really drab. Awful formula disco stuff...third rate drivel....Making up my list today, I kept thinking, ‘This isn’t any good’” (quoted in Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 363). At that time Bruce Springsteen

was being hailed for taking rock and roll back to the elemental style Peel enjoyed, but after attending one of Springsteen's first shows in London, Peel was unimpressed.

Despite the fact that, as he noted, *Rolling Stone* magazine had hailed the singer as "the future of rock 'n' roll;" Peel saw him simply as "a summary of its past" (363).

### **Peel and Punk!**

But within six months his faith was restored when he heard the first LP by the New York group, The Ramones. For Peel it was Damascene moment. Talking to Walters about his discovery of the band, he said,

Well, every week, and sometimes a couple of times a week, I used to go down to Virgin Records at Marble Arch, and the chap that was managing the place at the time used to (I'm sure without the approval of head office) allow me to take records out on approval. The ones I didn't want I'd return, and the ones I wanted and played on the radio I'd have to pay for. I took out ten or twelve records, one of which was the first LP by The Ramones. I liked several things about it. One thing I liked was the simplicity of the name really and the fact that it had an implication of that kind of Spanish New York thing, which seemed quite romantic, and also because it was a monochrome sleeve. So I took all of these things back and I put the record on and because of the aggression and brevity of the numbers, I was slightly taken aback by it. But I was sufficiently excited by it...that I put something like five or six tracks into that night's program...rewrote the running order and everything (Peel, Walters 1987: pt.4).

Looking back on the mid-1970s more than a decade later he talked about the so-called pub rock bands that had begun to make a splash in Britain in the previous couple of years, bands whose music was similar to that of The Faces and T Rex, largely simple, three chord rock 'n' roll. With the value of hindsight he saw them as harbingers of things to come. But clearly, reading his diary entry from the previous summer, he hadn't seen anything even vaguely interesting on the horizon at the time. But, as it turned out, The



Ramones were just the first of many bands that played very elemental music, all of whom were lumped under the sobriquet, punk!

Punk is a term that is often followed by an exclamation mark because for many people in the mid 1970s the music was like a slap in the face. It was a turning point musically and culturally in Britain in the mid-1970s. At that time, 15 per cent of the population in the UK (eight million people) was between the ages of 13 and 21. As a result of the brutal recession in the country, many were unemployed. Punk was not only a musical revolution, for many unemployed working class teenagers it was a vehicle through which to express their anger and frustration (Simonelli 2002:126).

Peel's embrace of the music divided his audience. The reaction the music provoked from many of his listeners was similar to the outraged reaction from many of his listeners when he first began playing reggae. Describing the response from his listeners after the first time he played several songs from The Ramones, who were not a punk band in the British sense at all, but whose music presaged the sound of the early British punk groups, he said,

The initial reaction was one...not hostility exactly...but people, rather as they had done when we first played reggae almost a decade previously, had written in saying 'Come on, old fellow. Pull yourself together!' As they do now with hip hop. Rather regretfully more than anything else. 'Come on. Get this nonsense out of your system, old boy, and get back to whatever it was....'

That sort of reaction has always excited me because whenever people start writing in in large numbers to complain, you always feel that there must be a good reason for it and I always tend to have exactly the opposite reaction to that which my letter writers, my correspondents, expect me to have. And so then, I seem to remember, we did a special sort of punk program (Peel, Walters 1987: pt. 4).

It is clear from those comments why it was that the punks who had little sympathy with the majority of Peel's colleagues on Radio One saw him as a kindred spirit and why he was able to reinvent his persona in light of this dramatic shift in popular culture in the UK

The "punk program" Peel referred to aired on December 10, 1976. It was the first program on which he began playing music by some of the early British punks whose angry rhetoric was seen as a real threat to the established order. Somewhat incongruously the program begins, as did all of his programs beginning in the mid-1970s, with the lazy, slide guitar driven shuffle, "Pickin' the Blues," by the Macon, Georgia based blues band, Grinderswitch. Over the opening strains of the languid instrumental Peel noted that "[Y]ou'll find this program a rather marked contrast from the programs that preceded it because tonight we're going to look at punk rock." However, what exactly defined punk rock was, as Peel noted, a topic of some dispute. "Mind you, no two people seem to be able to agree exactly what punk rock is, as is evidenced by the fact that someone's been phoning us off and on during the day and trying to convince us that our guests tonight, The Damned, are not a punk rock band." Adding that "punk rock" means "something entirely different to Americans" he went on to promise his listeners that they were about to hear a lot of music that *may* be punk rock, and a lot that certainly *is*."

Following a song by The Damned, "So Messed Up," he took the time to introduce each member of the band by name—"Dave Vanian on vocals, Brian James on guitar, the "wonderful" Captain Sensible, he's written that himself (an example of Peel's frequent use of what Goffman (1981) called an "interjection" in which he separated himself from the text), uh...on bass, and Rat Scabies on drums." His careful listing of the band

member's increasingly exotic names reflected a habit he maintained for the rest of his career when many of the group's whose music he played, as noted earlier, often cited airplay on the BBC as one of their primary goals. That Peel carefully read the name of each member of the band may well have been one of the reasons.

Ever the Reithian pedant, Peel followed the song by The Damned with a song by a group he "used to hang around with in California," The Seeds, one of the dozens of so-called garage bands who formed in the wake of The Beatles in the mid-1960's. Many did not manage to make it much further than the family garage, but those who did, said Peel, were "fairly crucial to the punk movement" in Britain in the 1970s. A movement it should be noted that may never have had the impact it did across the country if Peel had not relentlessly championed the music on Radio One.

The program is an aural treatise on punk rock. Peel's comment at the beginning of the program about the difficulty of defining the term was more than just, as it sounded when he first said it, a casual aside, it was in fact a question that he intended to at least try to answer. In the course of the first 15 minutes of the program he played a contemporary example of the music, followed by an early example from the mid-1960's, and a track from the early 1970's by Iggy and The Stooges. Iggy's stage persona was an early example of the kid from the wrong side of the tracks who has seen his dreams long since dashed and who really does feel, as so many of the punks in Britain claimed to feel, that there was no future for them. Following Iggy and The Stooges, he played a track by Eddie and the Hot Rods, a group who fell between the cracks of pub rock and punk. A favorite of Peel's, he does his best to add to their credibility by mentioning that "they're on the front of *Sniffing Glue*, and that's enough for me."

Listening to the recording of the program in 2007, one is struck both by the changes in British popular culture since the days of the *Perfumed Garden*, but also the similarities between Peel's espousal of the hippie philosophy of the late 1960s, and the apparently polar opposite philosophy of the young punks. What the two had in common, and equally what clearly mattered to Peel, was that both subcultures had served re-energize the music.

The next two songs on the program were from groups associated with the much celebrated CBGB's, a club housed in a dark, dank, narrow storefront on the Bowery, in New York City, at a time when the Bowery was far from the gentrified district with attendant rising real estate values it is in 2008. In the mid 1970s, when Richard Hell and The Voidoids, and Television, the two bands Peel featured on the program that night, performed in the club The Bowery was still a slightly dangerous place to go after dark. It was the perfect setting for a punk showcase.

Following a song, recorded in another New York City club, Max's Kansas City, by Pere Ubu, Peel put everything in historical perspective.

It's always good, I think, when you find papers at both ends of the newspaper spectrum violently opposed to any form of music. They used to do it in the days of The Rolling Stones and The Who, and they used to do it in the days of Elvis Presley and Bill Haley, as well. I'm not saying that these sort of bands are the new Who's and Rolling Stones and Elvis Presley's and Bill Haley's, but I'm very glad they're there because they bring an injection of energy and crudity into a rock scene that's been painfully smug and complacent during the last few years, I think.

By the mid 1970s, when punk first appeared, Peel was in his late-30s, old enough to have fathered many of the members of the groups whose music he was so passionately promoting. It was the culmination of the first major shift in his broadcast persona. He had

long since, as noted earlier, abandoned the dreamy wistfulness of his hippie persona, replacing that approach with a no-frills, “laddish” (i.e. a down market, quintessentially masculine self-identity) persona that was a marked contrast to his earlier hippie persona. However, he had always been an ardent supporter of Liverpool’s football club (an essential element of a “laddish” identity is a passion for sports) and, as noted earlier, he had had an abiding affection for wild men in music for much of his life.

In his introduction to the next record by “clearly the best known band in...I should think...the country at the moment,” The Sex Pistols, he noted that “people don’t seem to be playing their single very much at the moment.” In fact it had been banned from daytime airplay on Radio One following the group’s appearance on an early evening television newsmagazine the week before. The show’s presenter had done all he could to expose the group as a thoroughly abhorrent example of youthful disregard for the mores of the older generation. It was essentially, as Peel noted, a replay of the reaction to Elvis Presley in the 1950s, and The Rolling Stones in the 1960s. But, unlike their forebears, The Sex Pistols was a manufactured group composed of four out of work, working class teenagers brought together by Malcolm McLaren, a former art school student who ran a boutique called Sex, on the King’s Road in Chelsea to make a political point. McLaren was fascinated by the political ideas of Situationist International, a tiny group of anarchists whose intention was to overthrow the established order in Europe in the 1960’s. McLaren wanted to use The Sex Pistols to overthrow the established order in the music business (Simonelli 2002: 124).

Peel played “Anarchy in the UK” In his introduction he called the record “a real stomper.” As always, Peel’s passion was for the music, not politics. Nevertheless his

comment on the group's appearance on the television program which he noted had been "treated with a great deal of hypocrisy and over reaction" left little doubt as to where his sympathies lay.

The punk "revolution" was as ill defined as the hippie revolution of the previous decade, and despite the fear, largely created by the media, of the apparent social upheaval threatened by the punks, the "revolution" as before proved to be stylistic rather than substantive.

'Anarchy in the UK', said McLaren, is definitely a statement of intent—it's hard to say something constructive in rock these days. It's a call to arms to the kids who believe very strongly that rock and roll was taken away from them. And now it's coming back. 'Anarchy in the UK' is a statement of self-rule, of ultimate independence, of do-it-yourself, ultimately (Simonelli 2002: 126).

The punk revolution did serve to usher in an era of do-it-yourself as far as the music was concerned, and an increasing number of young musicians began to turn away from the established record companies to form small, independent labels, or in many cases to simply release and distribute their music themselves on limited issue singles and cassettes, many of which received airplay on Peel's program.

He closed the program with a couple of songs by The Ramones, noting that he had received a number of letters complaining about them when he first played their record, "but now people seem to regard them as being pretty tame." In some respects much of the music on the program could be described the same way. Despite the general hue and cry about the music, in many ways much of the music Peel played on this "punk" special was fairly conventional three chord rock 'n' roll. In closing the program Peel reiterated his enthusiasm for the energy of the music while making clear that

[A]t the age of 37, and weighing just a little bit over 13 stone...alright, 13 ½ stone (189 lb), if you insist, I'm not about to dress up as a punk, or change me hairstyle or anything, unlike one or two media people who seem to be trying to affect the lifestyle and appearance of punkdom. But, I'm grateful to the bands and people who make the music, well, most of them anyway, for the excitement, due to debate, and the general bewilderment they've brought back to the rock scene. It's been long missed, and sorely missed, I think.

His self-description, later summarized as "I always say I look like a minicab driver," served to deflect any criticism suggesting that he was hardly of the generation whose music he was so enthusiastically promoting. At the same time it reinforced the "honesty" of his persona, he never tried, as he suggested some of his colleagues did, to pass himself off as anything other than who he was, often expressing that self-identity in unflinchingly unsympathetic terms.

The reaction from the management at Radio One toward punk put Walters in the position of having to defend Peel and the music he was playing. On the Monday following the broadcast, Derek Chinnery, who replaced Muggeridge as the controller for Radio One in 1976, called Walters. He was apparently hoping that Walters would reassure him that he and Peel had not been playing any of "this filth."

'I'm just checking that you're not going to be using any, are you?' he said. 'Well, we already have, Derek,' I said. 'What!' he exclaimed. I said we'd played several records, and the audience liked them. 'Yes, but you won't be getting them into BBC studios, will you? Well, actually, I said, [we recorded a session with] The Damned...last week (quoted in Garner 1993: 102).

The Sex Pistols didn't do a session for the program—"one of the only two mistakes I've ever made," said Walters. He had been to see them play at a club in London called the 100 Club.

‘When I walked in,’ Walters said, I thought, ‘Well, it’s over for these people now, because I’ve found it. If they were on at the 100 Club and I knew about it, it was no longer underground...

‘Looking back now,’ he added, ‘the whole punk scene must have been in that room. Nothing was fixed stylistically, people just looked a little odd; but there was a very conscious kicking over of the traces. I just remember it being banging and shouting. I’d never seen pogo-ing before, and all this spitting. I thought this was *wonderful*’ (quoted in Garner 1993: 100).

Walters was impressed with the excitement the group was creating in the audience, but the teacher in him took over when he began to think about bringing the group into the studio to record a session for the program. When he got back to the studio, Peel asked him about the show.

‘So, what did you think?’ He said, ‘Well, I don’t know what to make of it, John. I’m not sure if they’d be right for a session because musically they’re not a very good band. But,’ he said, ‘I’ll tell you what, that Johnny Rotten, if he was in my class I wouldn’t let him hand out the scissors’ (Lycett 2007).

Walters’ principal concern was for the reaction of the BBC’s studio engineers who would have to deal with the group if he invited them in to record a session for the program.

Talking to Walters about punk in 1987, Peel again rejoiced in the changes it had engendered. While acknowledging that it was easy for him to suggest that being part of a band shouldn’t be regarded as a career choice, he nevertheless felt that when musicians made that choice it almost always resulted in inferior music.

I liked the fact that some of the bands, after they’d recorded the sessions—and, of course, it’s easy for me to say this because quite clearly I’m not involved and, as it were, my career isn’t anything to do with this—but, I mean, what happened was that bands would come along, record a session, and then break up. The feeling seemed to be that having recorded a Peel session was as far as they wanted to go, or sometimes they’d just make a record and once the record had been played on the radio, again they’d break up feeling that that was enough. I quite like the idea of that because for something like six or seven years prior to the advent of punk we rather suffered from the fact that we were caught up with a number of bands who



quite clearly saw what they were doing as being part of a lifelong career strategy that was going to take them into old age still churning out the hits in big stadiums and so forth in America. Some of the groups are out there at this very moment *doing it* I'm appalled to say. So the punk attitude seemed to me to be entirely appropriate where being in a band, making records, was only part of an entire lifestyle rather than being just an end in itself. It was something that people wanted to do, but, having done, would then discard. I liked that idea (Peel, Walters 1987 pt.4).

It is an interesting paradox that while Peel saw the notion of the musicians turning music making into a career as a negative decision, he did not seem to any longer feel that his having made that his involvement in popular music culture a career was contradictory. In fact, one of *his* career concerns at the time was that he would be included in the sweeping changes that punk engendered. He was sure that the first time he actually went to one of the shows he would be dismissed as a member of the hippie old guard that the punks so despised. Nobody was in any doubt that Peel had been a hippie, but, as Lycett notes, his genuine enthusiasm for the music allowed him to connect with the new generation.

When...these bands realized the sincerity...you couldn't help but be won over by his sincerity. There was a great story about when he went to see a band, I can't remember which one it was...he went to see them at The Vortex, which was a punk club in London, I wasn't with him but I think Walters was, and he went in...and everybody was a bit unsure about punk, you know, everybody was a bit wrong footed by it, and Peel went in and one of the bands who were playing came up to him and said, 'Oi, you're John Peel aren't you?' He said, 'Yes.' 'Oh, you've played our record, haven't ya?' And he said, 'Oh yeah, I think I did once.' He said, 'Oi, have you got one of our badges?' Peel, feeling a bit self-defensive, said, 'Oh, no I don't think I have.' 'Well, here you are then!' and he blew a whole mouthful of gob (spit). It landed on Peel's jumper and just trickled down. 'There ya are, John. That's something for you to remember us by!' and he wandered off (Lycett 2007).

Ironically his one regret about the period was the degree to which he was accepted by the new audience, and as a result that he had allowed punk to dominate his program to

the exclusion of any other type of music at the time. It should also be noted that Peel's criticism of the musicians who had chosen to make music a career was not that they wanted a career, but that they wanted to make a career based on a relatively brief period of creativity in their lives. Peel believed in living in the moment, as exemplified by his comment about Bolan and T Rex earlier. But he had also begun to understand at that point how easy it was for anyone to be caught up in the lure of the spotlight largely for its own sake and to lose sight of their original goals.

It wasn't a period that I particularly enjoyed in a way...as far as the radio went, anyway...because the program became given over almost entirely to punk records and punk related stuff... and reggae, as well, but actually nothing else. I think in retrospect that that was probably a mistake because the programs that we do now are much more broad, they cover a much wider range of stuff, and I think that's really the way it should be. What happened, I suppose, to be perfectly honest, was that the program, as it has done from time to time over the years, became fleetingly *fashionable*. It became almost obligatory, for example, to put on the back of your single 'Thanks to John Peel and John Walters.' I understood in a small way what it must be like to be in a very, very successful group and the extent to which the requirements of your audience rather take over from what you'd actually rather be doing. I mean to the point where perhaps you don't even realize it yourself until later as I didn't. It was so exciting to be a vaguely fashionable figure at my advanced age and the state of disrepair that I was in that I probably went along with it a little too enthusiastically and thereby missed out on a lot of other stuff that perhaps I should have been playing and which I might even have been listening to at home (Peel, Walters 1987 pt.4).

Paradoxically, given the attitude of the management at Radio One toward the music, it was punk that ensured that Peel would continue to his program into the next decade. It was also a period when he was on the air for more hours every week than at any other time in his career. From April 1977 until November 1979 he was on the air for two hours every night, and from November 1979 until January 1984 he was on the air for two

hours a night every night but Friday. For Lycett, it was a period in which he cemented his reputation and his position on Radio One.

I think it would be fair to say that Peel was always needed, in the context of the BBC, and let's be absolutely honest, don't let's not be too big headed about it, it was only because of the BBC's unique position in British Broadcasting, and the way it's funded and everything else, that really allowed it to do it to the extent that it did. But even within that, I think its quite feasible that somewhere...I would put the time in the mid '70s... if Walters hadn't really, really been championing Peel he might have been on a reducing number of broadcasts and phased out over a couple of years. Yeah, I think that's highly possible. But then, of course, once we got past punk, Peel was always much quicker on the ball than a lot of us...and by...let's say 1985, Peel had been with the radio station for going on twenty years, so then, I wouldn't say he was unfireable or unsackable, but, you know, I think it was then there did become a grudging reluctance...they didn't understand it ...but they knew it worked so they just let him get on with it (Lycett 2007).

In 1976, Derek Chinnery took over as controller on Radio One. Like his predecessors, he did not understand Peel's programming or his popularity, said John Walters.

There's no doubt that various people in power would have liked to get rid of us at some stage, but the trouble was that we were the ones that people used to come from Finland or Los Angeles to see. We were once asked to represent the BBC at a broadcasting conference in Spain. Derek Chinnery, who was controller then, went with us. But previously he'd sent a memo to the organizers saying, 'I can bring John Walters and John Peel, but why would you want to talk to them? They're not at all typical of Radio One.' I think that was the nicest thing he'd ever said about us (quoted in Garfield 1998: 258).

Chinnery believed that Radio One should be a populist service, playing the records that people were buying as reflected by the sales charts. However, what Chinnery did not acknowledge in his defense of the programming on Radio One was that, as a monopoly, Radio One was the only place people could hear pop music.

We're a popular music service. Why do people listen? They want to hear their favorite music and that is represented by the charts, the one yardstick you have of the popularity of the material....Those listeners who don't buy records don't know what they want to listen to until they hear it; the fact that enough people buy a record to put it into the chart, that makes it even more important that Radio One plays it. By playing it you are increasing its familiarity and hopefully its popularity, and people will grow to recognize it (quoted in Barnard 1998:118).

It is a confusingly circular argument, and one that is made that much more confounding by Chinnery's expressed skepticism for Peel's programming which operated on essentially the same principle as that espoused by Chinnery (i.e. If playing the music increases its popularity then surely any style of music should be given equal weight on the network's playlist). But, for Chinnery, Peel's judgment was fundamentally flawed.

There is a joke that a band with a clever name stands the best chance of getting a session, but I promise you that's not true. You can go around clubs if you're auditioning, but it must be very difficult to distance yourself from the atmosphere of a club. John told me he listened to 500 cassettes last weekend—an accumulation of material over a number of weeks—but I can't see how you can retain your objectivity with that amount of material. There are just so many bands around now—every lad in school wants to play a guitar, be in a group (quoted in Barnard 1998: 162-63).

From Walters' perspective, it was Chinnery who did not understand the programming on the network. The fundamental absurdity of his decision making practice was apparent to Walters when he asked him about the kind of music he planned to play in the evening to bridge the transition between the mainstream daytime programming and Peel's decidedly non-mainstream programming beginning at 10 o'clock every evening. Walters began the conversation by reminding the controller that

Peel and me have achieved a certain status over the years, and we know what it is we're doing. I'm just pointing out that we're not going to change just because you might be playing The New Seekers at 8:30 p.m. Then I

said, ‘Well, what sort of music are you going to put in there?’ I knew that Derek didn’t know a crotchet from a hatchet. He knew famous names, more of a career BBC man...He said, ‘On Noel’s Breakfast show, for the kids going to school, on a scale of 1 to 10, he’s playing music that’s 1 and 2. With Bates (midday) it gets to 3 and 4. Throughout the afternoon we move on to 5 and 6. But John’s show, as you know, is perhaps a little too much 9 and 10. Then I said, ‘But we’re back to the same question: What sort of music will you instruct producers and DJs should be used in that in-between period?’ He looked at me as if I’d gone mad and was a complete idiot, and said, ‘Well, it’s obvious, 7 and 8!’ (quoted in Garfield 1998: 10).

Chinnery’s successor, Johnny Beerling, was no less perplexed by Peel and his “kind of music.” “He never, never understood it, never ever, ever, whether or not he would *admit* it” (Lycett 2007). Talking about Peel, Beerling was circumspect,

I didn’t like the music he played...it wasn’t to my personal taste. But then at 55 it shouldn’t have been; but John was almost the same age as me. He could still maintain his interest and enthusiasm (Beerling 2007).

He may not have liked the music Peel played, but he had, as he said, allowed Peel and Walters a free hand.

I don’t think that Peel and Walters and I got along too badly at all. They were probably pretty skeptical about me when I first started because I’m the man that ran the Radio One Roadshow and made you go around with a school uniform on and that sort of thing, but on the other hand I did give them the freedom to do what they wanted. (Beerling, May 4, 2007).

Peel and Walters did come to a grudging rapprochement with Beerling, but for much of the time they worked together neither he nor Peel had much time for the affable man who clearly didn’t understand the appeal of programming that was so different to his vision for the station. For his part Beerling came to accept a bifurcated station with a format defined by his assistant head of programming, Roger Lewis.

There was always a sort of skepticism on the part of...Walters, Peel and the other producers that worked in that area and those that worked in the top forty area. Roger Lewis was a Welshman who worked as my head of department who came up with a saying—“Ratings by day, and reputation

by night.” That wasn’t bad sense because if you think about who is available to listen during the daytime it isn’t a specialist audience because they’re mostly at work during the day. The people who listen during the daytime are young housewives, people working in factories, and people driving their cars so it didn’t make sense to play alternative music during the day because there weren’t that many fans of that music around during the day. The other stuff is in the evening (Beerling 2007).

Beerling’s reference to “the other stuff” marks him as less than a fan, but it is clear from his remarks about the station during that period that he was a realist, and as Lycett suggested, and he had come to accept the two radically different stations within Radio One.

Whether the “threat” perceived by Peel and Walters was real or not, and Lycett’s earlier comments confirmed Peel’s suspicion (Garfield 1998: 257) that there were times when Peel’s dismissal had been considered, Walters was always protecting Peel, much like an older brother. According to Lycett, whenever a member of the management questioned Peel’s position at the station, it was

Walters [who] would go in there like a blunderbuss and blow them all out of the water. And, of course, as Walters pointed out, when they needed a showcase to trot out to exemplify what a wide public service broadcaster in the field of music Radio One was at some EBU Conference (European Broadcasting Union--Professional Association of National Broadcasters that negotiates and advocates for interests of public broadcasters in Europe.), or something like that, who were the first people they trotted out but Peel and Walters. Thereby making the point, and yet having maybe six months earlier thought about taking him off, out they go and say, “Look. These are the boys that discovered punk. These are the boys that did this, that did that...this is how you do radio, chappies in Europe” (Lycett 2007).

Another reason that Walters may have felt the need to protect Peel was because he saw him as being a little naïve, a lamb among wolves, said Lycett.

Walters always maintained because he (Peel) went to public school... that he never really grew up and fended for himself. ...and Walters would say, ‘I know what it was, he had a nanny when he was a kid, he then went to

public school, so he grew up with a bloody house master and a nanny.’  
That was Walters rather abrupt view of it (Lycett 2007).

### **“The Music of the Black Criminal Classes”**

Walters remained Peel’s champion through out the 1980’s, a relatively quiet period musically, except for the advent of hip-hop which, like reggae and punk before it, had divided his audience, and often left the management of the station and the network, aghast. In fact, according to Peel:

Someone from management did come down when I was playing a lot of hip-hop, and then later when I was playing jungle, to inform me that I shouldn’t be playing this music because it was the music of the black criminal classes (quoted in Garfield 1998: 256).

That Peel felt comfortable ignoring this dictum is apparent in his opening remarks on the John Peel Show that aired on June 15 1987. Over the languid opening notes of the program’s by then familiar signature tune played by Grinderswitch, Peel began, uncharacteristically, by introducing himself by name, something he very rarely did, apparently assuming that people listening to the program already knew him. “Hello, this is John Peel...and I have in front of me the inspiring slogan from radio station K-I-M-Y (pronouncing each letter very deliberately) in Oklahoma City—‘no punk, no funk, no elevated junk’—quite right, too. This is Heresy.”

His introduction exemplifies what Goffman (1981) calls “subversion” (i.e. ironic, sarcastic or derisive comments on the copy). Peel had a talent for that, and it was a very powerful tool in establishing his persona as he demonstrated on this program. The first record by Heresy, is a bracing punch in the face of a record lasting all of thirty seconds, featured a vocalist shouting an indecipherable lyric against a wall of distorted fuzztone guitars and a manic relentless rhythm. Within the first hour of the program he had played

a number of records, like the first from Heresy, that fit the description punk or funk, but he had always had an aversion to “elevated junk,” and this program’s playlist was no exception.

In fact, putting aside the changes in the music in the twenty years between this broadcast and *The Perfumed Garden* programs in 1967, the essence of the program was the same. His approach to announcing had changed inasmuch as he spoke much more quickly for the most part, and with little trace of the nasal Liverpoolian drawl he had employed early in his career. His accent is still notably Liverpoolian, but his delivery is very crisp and upbeat while still very conversational. He talked to his audience as if he knew every listener personally, and the suggestion inherent in his comments following Heresy suggests that he had an increasingly paternal relationship with at least some of the groups whose music he played on the program. Coming on the heels of the record by Heresy, his breezy affect stands in stark contrast to blunt brutality of the record.

That’s Heresy, and it’s called “Visions in Fear.” And a letter from the Thieves, writing to me from Glasgow, saying ‘‘Dear John Peel, After one play on your show of The Thieves’ ‘Kin Will Talk Your Head Off’ all sorts of managers, publicists, A and R men etc. coming up to see our next gig.’ I hope it went well. Here’s the second playing of the record. Who can say what’ll happen after this...

After playing the record he read out the “contact address” for the group. “The Thieves who come from, well, Cumbernauld to be exact, that’s their contact address anyway—25 Meadow View, Cumbernauld.” For him this is apparently business as usual, just another program on which he is doing his best to help a young group find an audience. Following standard music radio practice he follows each record by identifying the performers and the title of the record, but he also gives the label, and as in this instance gives an address



where a listener might be able to get a copy of the record. This is another example of his continuing subversion of the music business practice of a label signing a performer, releasing the record, sending it to radio, and the radio DJ playing the record to, in effect, advertise its availability as a commercial product. His program, beginning with *Tyrannosaurus Rex* in 1968, had long been a site for the promotion of music by musicians without any label affiliation and, as noted earlier, for many who had no intention of ever going beyond releasing the record themselves and getting it played on Peel's Radio One program (see Peel, Walters 1987; pt.3; Savage 2002; Reynolds 2006).

Later in the program, Peel is talking about a record he had just received from a group, a particular favorite of his, from South Africa. In his several failed attempts to pronounce the title of the album he exemplifies another of Goffman's observations on "broadcast talk."

Now consider the convenience that can be made of the remedial process. Take a speaker who must utter a foreign word.... A standard recourse is to break frame and gild the pronunciation, either by affecting an uneducated hyper-Anglicization, or by an articulation flourish that mimics a fully authentic version—in either case providing a response that isn't merely remedial and can't quite be seen simply as corrective social control. Here the danger of making a mistake is not merely avoided, it is 'worked,' exploited, turned to advantage in the apparent cause of fun (Goffman 1981: 221)

In Peel's case the "fun" is often at his expense—he is making fun of his ability—and often his inability—to pronounce a name or title in a language other than English. Like many native English speakers in the UK he is reasonably comfortable with European languages, but often ill at ease and much less confident when dealing with African and Asian names and titles. Following a record that sounds remarkably like one of the records by *The Misunderstood*, Peel begins his discourse with

Play the blues, dude. That's A.C. Temple, and this thing here that I'm banging (accompanied by the noise of his banging on what sounds like a tin can) is something that I've been looking forward to for a very long time indeed, It's the new LP from The Bhundu Boys. 'More Real Shed Sounds from Zimbabwe,' it says, and the LP is called (chuckles) no...stumbles over the pronunciation...tries a second time...no, no —I tell you what. By tomorrow night I will work out exactly how I should say it, and we'll play a track from it. It's translated as "Sticks of Fire," and I'm tempted to change the whole of tonight's program and put in four or five tracks, but you see I'm too old for that sort of thing, that sort of irresponsible behavior. But here is another record that was sent to me from Zimbabwe by Julian Walker who is teaching out there. It's from The Marxist Brothers, and I'm sure Andy's played stuff by The Marxist Brothers. He may even have played this track.

He sounds like a very affable avuncular man chatting with his younger friends about something that, in this instance, may be familiar to them and, despite his difficulty with pronouncing the title, is very familiar to him. As far back as the late 1960s he had been playing African music on the *Night Ride* program, but he never alludes to that fact. Instead he gives credit to his friend Andy Kershaw, a DJ hired by Radio One in the mid-1980s as his putative replacement (Kershaw 2005) for his promotion of African music on his program on the network. Once he was hired by Radio One, far from trying to replace Peel, Kershaw became one of his closest friends and was one of Peel's most passionate defenders.

But reflecting on his relationship with Kershaw in the late 1990s, Peel gives the impression that he felt it was Kershaw who needed his protection.

After he joined Radio One, he shared an office with John Walters and I. It was very much Walters's office, and Andy and I were only just tolerated. I saw him as a kindred spirit, and immediately thought what he played was good. It sounds absurd, but when Andy came to Radio One, he was almost the first person that I'd met here with a real interest in music. There were other people as well - Kid Jensen and Janice Long. But a lot of the DJs made a virtue of the fact that they had no interest in music at all. At the time, Andy was playing a lot of wonderful African music, but I think his

original brief was to play more stuff like REM. I used to give him a lot of unsought advice. He was an impetuous fellow, and so I'd say to him: 'Wait until you're a bit more secure here and then let go'(quoted in Garfield 1998: 256).

Peel, as Andrews suggested earlier, did not appear to bow to anyone when deciding what to play on his program. One example of his idiosyncratic selection process on this program was a record of powerboat racing from the United States in the 1960s which he introduced by telling his listeners that he was

reading in a couple of magazines, actually, about boat racing going on in Bristol at this very moment...well, not exactly now at 25 minutes to 11...but I mean in the recent past anyway. So I thought I'd go and look at it, and then I found out that something like 300,000 people (chuckling) went down to watch it. I thought, 'Well, I'm not going to see much with that lot down there,' so I dragged out this record instead. It's sort of...you know, it's the same sort of thing. It's a record called 'Big Drag Boats USA'...uh, 'The Music and The Sounds.' It's rather good actually. It's by The Hornets. 'Steel Pole' is the title of it.

The record begins with the sounds of loud engines revving segued into a guitar driven instrumental with a brief honking sax solo; the sort of thing U.S. television shows from the 60s always used on the soundtrack whenever they wanted to show a teenage dance party. Following the record, Peel enthusiastically shares more details about the record with his listeners.

Well, those are The Hornets, and that comes from an LP called 'Big Drag Boats USA' issued years and years and years ago. And that's called 'The Steel Pole.' Quite clearly the beginning part of the tracks are the really good bits. I'll play you the beginning of the next one as well. Hold on a minute (slightly off mike). Here we go. Following the sounds of revving engines, Peel is back. Great stuff! I actually had an LP that was nothing but drag boat racing sounds, but uh it was recorded in Riverside...no, it was on the Riverside label. Was it recorded in Riverside? I forget. Well, anyway something of a collector's item. It disappeared out of my collection about 25 years ago. If any of you have got *it*, can I have it *back*.

His boyish enthusiasm for loud engines is very much of a piece with his Radio One persona of a man at one with his teenage listeners. He shares their passion not only for raucous music, but also for rowdy motor sports. His attitude throughout his discourse exemplifies Goffman's concept of "self-consciousness...in which the announcer enters into a dialog with himself—one part of him playing the part of the listener who is unable to directly respond" (Goffman 1981: 286). It is a technique that Peel frequently employed as a means of drawing his listeners into his, at times, rather idiosyncratic soliloquies.

He followed the dragboat record with one by a group of rappers from the United States, The Fat Boys, and another blunt slab of noise by a group called Ripchord. The record is very similar to the earlier one by Heresy, albeit slightly longer, a fact Peel recognized in his comments that followed it. "That's really one of the longest tracks (approx. 90seconds) on the LP called 'Defiance of Power' and comes from Manic Ears Records."

A little later in the program his comments following a record by a reggae group from Liverpool make it clear that he still embraced the communal ideals of the 1960s, and also that he was still receiving complaints from his listeners about some of the music on the program—a comment he is more than happy to blithely dismiss by suggesting he recognized the power of his autonomy.

That's the L8 Connection as in Liverpool 8 and it comes...well, I'll read you what it says in the press release. This 12 inch is the first record out of the new United and Fighting label, which is the Merseyside Trade Union's unemployed youth resource center recording logo. It was recorded in the Centre's own 8 track recording studio which was built financed by the now abolished Merseyside County Council. It exists now because of donations from various pop stars including Paul McCartney, Pete Townshend, Paul Weller, New Order, Elvis Costello, Depeche Mode and Joe Strummer. Well good for all of them, certainly. And that's, as I say,

the first 12 inch to have come about as a result of all of this by The L8 Connection, and it's called 'Freedom For Africa.' This [next record] is for Don Mayfield who claims in a rather extravagant letter that he's leaving Britain in order to escape from the hip-hop content of this program, and he plans on living in Germany. You'll find when you get over there that I follow you (chuckles) in a curious way, so watch out!

Following a record by a group called The Beat Poets, Peel draws back the curtain to reveal an example of the internal workings of the program. It is a quintessential example of an approach Goffman (1981) identified as "self-reporting."

Those are The Beat Poets, and before that it was Sonic Youth from their current and excellent LP. I have to admit that I put The Beat Poets right back to the back of the pile of records I was going to listen to over the weekend because I thought to myself—I hadn't even bothered to look at the sleeve—I thought, 'oh, Beat Poets, I know what that means, it means somebody reading half-baked poetry while somebody plays saxophone rather badly in the background.' And then I read something about The Beat Poets in the current issue, I think it's the current issue, of *Cut*, which is a newspaper worth a read if you see one around, and immediately went and brought The Beat Poets record from the back of the pile to the front instead(chuckles). But, uh, this is how we work on this program. It's terrifically exciting. I'm sure you're thrilled by every minute detail that I've passed on to you. That's called Killers B on 53<sup>rd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Records...

Acutely aware that this degree of self-reporting draws some listeners closer, while alienating others, Peel injects that "qualifier" toward the end of his comments signaling that he is well aware that this sort of minutiae flies dangerously close to self absorption for some listeners, while drawing others closer through this self revelation. Goffman (1981) suggests that this is a technique often used by broadcasters to establish their individual persona in a scripted situation. Peel's remarks are almost certainly extemporaneous, but he was always conscious of his position and his persona on Radio One and he policed it very carefully.

Toward the end of the program, in yet another echo of his early programs on Radio One, Peel read from a listener's letter while alluding to the fact that much of his mail was in response to a competition that was on-going at that point. His attitude toward the competition is ambivalent. On the program in the 1960s, as noted earlier, the purpose of the "competition" was to parody such standard radio practice. This contest is apparently a serious attempt at engaging his listeners in competition with each other with an apparent reward for the winner, but he is clearly more interested in the personal mail he has received.

Most of the mail I've been getting at the moment has been from people entering the competition which makes it rather dull for me going through it all because it's obviously mostly lists on postcards and the backs of envelopes and things. But Ian Holthy has written to me not once, but twice, and he's cycling towards John O' Groats. The first one was from The Lake District and uh...he said it had been raining continuously, and the second one is from Fort William, which is a town I like particularly. I've only ever been there once, I must confess, but I thought it was really good. And uh...it's still raining. It must be beginning to feel...he must be beginning to feel as though he's been cycling under water for the past couple of weeks. If you're listening, Ian, this next record is to cheer you and your traveling companion up. It's from John Fahey, 'On The Sunny Side of the Ocean.'

In terms of his parasocial relationship with at least some of his listeners, Peel's reference to the letters, and to the writer by name in the way one might tell a friend about a letter from a mutual acquaintance, suggests his deliberate development of an unusually open and close relationship with his audience. It is an example of parasocial interaction exactly as defined by Horton and Wohl (1956): "The more the performer seems to adjust his performance to the supposed response of the audience, the more the audience tends to make the response anticipated" (215).

Peel read the letter and suggested in his comments that that was the sort of correspondence he wanted from his audience. It is an example of his ambivalence toward standard radio practice inasmuch as he had engaged in the promotion of a competition and his listeners had responded, but it is clear that what he really wants is a dialog with his listeners. In that period, before the widespread use of email, that was the only way he could effect that dialog. It is apparently possible to reach a DJ on Radio One by phone, but Peel rarely referred to a phone conversation with his listeners on Radio One. However, within a decade Peel's interaction with many of his listeners became much more direct when he began hosting a very different program for the BBC's talk network, Radio Four. The next chapter will analyze his persona broadcaster on both Radio One and Radio Four while documenting his apotheosis as a broadcaster in the last decade of his life.

In the period covered in this chapter, Peel's persona went through a radical transformation as a result of the social and political upheavals of the 1970s and 1980s, which were reflected in the music he played on his program. Peel entered the 1970s as Radio One's "token hippie." Within two years he had begun to shed that persona in favor of the more "laddish" persona he projected for much of his career. The two personae had co-existed in Peel from the beginning of his career in the UK, but in the late 1960s and early 1970s he had emphasized the idealistic, dreamy and whimsical side of his personality. In the early 1970s, as noted in this chapter, the combination of Peel's disillusionment with the counter-culture and the influence of his future wife and his new producer, neither of whom had any sympathy with the vaguely defined ideals of the

hippie culture, Peel began to emphasize the football and fun side of his personality in the 1970s.

But contrary to the notion of a persona as a public performance of an idealized self (Goffman 1982), Peel, according to his colleagues and friends interviewed for this study, was the same person on the air and off the air. This serves to explain why his persona is more complex than the assumed “scripted persona” identified by Horton and Wohl (1956). Peel’s persona, as exemplified in the analysis of his broadcast talk in this chapter, expanded as his personal life expanded to embrace his four children and his growing status as a broadcaster. This is the essence of his appeal for generations of listeners. He contradicted the widely accepted notion that broadcast personalities were a construct often with little relation to the person behind the mask. Peel was perceived by his listeners as a sincere, three dimensional human beings replete with the attributes and flaws of an ordinary man.



## Chapter 7

### The Senior Service

The key thing to say about John is that, at the moment we're all thinking about the tremendous impact he's had on the world of music, but we shouldn't forget the huge impact that was also there, through *Home Truths*, on family life" (Anderson, 2007).

Using the evidence presented in the previous three chapters as a foundation, this chapter examines Peel's apotheosis as a broadcaster in the last decade of his career, when he worked for both Radio One and Radio Four. Radio Four, known colloquially within the BBC as the "senior service," serves as a showcase for the work of the nation's most talented playwrights, authors, poets, and public intellectuals. Peel's acceptance by Radio Four's older, more conservative audience, along with his being awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE), illustrate the extent to which, by the end of his life, he had managed to transcend formats, generational boundaries, and the BBC itself to become a cultural icon. In contrast to Chignell and Devlin's (2006) suggestion that Peel shifted his on-air identity for his Radio Four program, *Home Truths*, this chapter argues that the broadcast persona he had developed on Radio One served him equally well on Radio Four, and that his approach on both stations was essentially the same.

The chapter begins by outlining the period in the 1990s following John Walters' retirement. At this time, the BBC faced renewed criticism from Conservatives MPs who questioned the continued need for public support of Radio One and Radio Two. Radio One's management reacted to the criticism by making sweeping changes in both personnel and programming. Matthew Bannister, the new controller for Radio One, and

his assistant, Trevor Dann, attempted to reinvent Radio One. Peel remained on the air at Radio One, but his hours were reduced, and his program was regularly moved to different time slots in the schedule.

This chapter also examines Peel's writing career, which is necessary to provide context for the discussion that follows of the (non-music) interview programs he hosted on Radio Four, including the highly rated *Home Truths*. The final section of this chapter includes a rhetorical analysis of the Radio One and Radio Four programs Peel produced between the late 1990s and 2004 in support of the assertion that his persona remained essentially unchanged on the two networks.

The story of Peel's rise to the top of the BBC—particularly in light of the turbulence of his previous three decades there—is a testament not only to his broadcasting skills, but also to his rapport with diverse audiences and dexterity at managing his dual role as an insider and outsider. In fact, in many ways the last decade of his life proved to be the culmination of his career as a broadcaster. It was a time when he was widely recognized both for his work on Radio One and on Radio Four. However, in the period between 1993 and 1998, like many of his colleagues, Peel had begun to develop legitimate concerns about his future with the network.

### **“Night of the Long Knives”**

In June 1991, when Peel's long-time producer, John Walters retired from the BBC, Peel lost his most ardent champion. Within two years he was worried that he might also lose his job. In the wake of the sweeping changes introduced by Matthew Bannister, many of his co-workers were indeed displaced. Then in late 1993, Johnny Beerling, who had been with the network since its inception in 1967, also stepped down as the controller

for Radio One. By the early 1990s, the approach Beerling had taken to programming the network had become outdated, and he had come to understand, as he told a reporter, “[that] it was time that I actually did make a move” (quoted in Garfield 1998: 10). The BBC, and Radio One in particular, had been the target of frequent criticism from what Beerling called “the opinion formers of the country, the MPs and the people...particularly on the right wing of the Tory Party.... [who] thought that the BBC was just too big, should be smaller, should leave most of these things to the market place, including Radio One and Radio Two” (10, 20). Radio One’s critics argued that instead of offering unique programming that commercial radio could not afford to offer, Radio One was indistinguishable from the commercial pop music stations. As a result, John Birt, the newly hired Director-General of the BBC, came under pressure to downsize the BBC.

Local commercial radio stations had existed in Britain since the early 1970s, but Radio One had been the only national network that programmed popular music until 1993; hence, it was well-established and commanded a huge share of the audience. In the period between 1967 and 1974, 25 million people, half the population, listened to Radio One (Lycett 2007). When local commercial stations began to appear in 1973, Radio One’s audience was somewhat eroded. But according to Beerling, the network held onto most of its listeners until 1993. That assertion is borne out by the audience listening figures compiled by Radio Joint Audience Research Ltd. (Rajar), which issues a quarterly ratings report. According to Rajar, Radio One had 19.23 million listeners in the summer of 1993.

However, by the time Beerling ceded control of Radio One to Bannister in November 1993, both its audience and its DJs were aging. On a station with a target

audience of 12-to-25-year-olds, the average listener was 31 (Garfield 1998: 44).

Although the station had significant ratings, Birt was concerned about the network's credibility with young listeners. Specifically, he was also looking for a way to answer the critics who charged that Radio One was indistinguishable from its commercial rivals, a claim with which he was largely in agreement. He hired Bannister, who, at 36, was 30 years younger than Beerling, to revamp the programming on the network. As Bannister saw it, Radio One had become too immersed in its own legend and had lost touch with its intended audience. "Many people," he said, "could see that it needed to change, but it had gone way beyond the need for just minor tweaking" (quoted in Garfield 1998: 13). He introduced dramatic changes in both Radio One's programming and personnel. For DJs like Annie Nightingale (2007), who had joined the BBC in 1969, the changes were jarring and frightening. "It was a terrifying and painful time," she remembers, "everybody frightened for their jobs, producers as well as DJs. No one was talking to each other. I'd survived a few shake-ups before, but this was on a very different level, approaching hysteria."

From Beerling's perspective, the changes were introduced too quickly and without any regard for the audience, much less personnel at the network. As a veteran radio programmer and administrator, he considered them foolish and ill-advised:

[T]he chap who replaced me decided to get rid of all the old faces and change the format and make the station younger. They lost about half the audience in about three months and commercial radio gained enormously.... They took nearly every single disc jockey I had used and either sacked them or put them in a different time slot (Beerling 2007).

According to Rajar, the station's ratings dropped from 14.3 million in the fourth quarter of 1993 to 11 million in the fourth quarter of 1994. Meanwhile, audience figures

for Radio Two, which slowly had changed its programming to attract the audience alienated by the changes on Radio One, began to increase. Like Radio One, Radio Two's problems were also largely born of failure on the part of management to acknowledge that they, too, had an aging audience and had hung onto their music programming policy too long. As Lycett explained,

Now the logical thing for the likes of Dave Lee Travis, Mike Read, Johnnie Walker and Steve Wright would have been to graduate to Radio Two and take their audience with them, enabling [Radio One] to get new younger people to appeal to the younger audience. That would have been a natural progression. But...the controller of Radio Two wouldn't have that at the time.

Nobody actually banged the heads together of the controllers of Radio One and Two and said, 'Look, this is how you're gonna do it.' I don't think anybody senior to them really took it very seriously anyway....they didn't understand it, and so they didn't turn around to the then controller of Radio Two...who was actually heard to say at some meeting or other, 'I don't want any of that thump thump music on my radio station.' This was when she was still playing marches and waltzes, and people playing folk with their fingers in their ears, and God knows what...and somebody, you know, the Managing Director of Radio should've said, 'Look, I'm sorry, there's no way we can make Radio One younger without [change]' (Lycett 2007).

Peel had never taken his position on the Radio One for granted, which may have been why he was the only DJ from the original line-up who remained on the air after Bannister's purge. Always afraid that when his contract came up for renewal, as it did every year, he would lose his job, Peel had never felt secure in his position despite the many listener polls and awards he received (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 416). Ironically, at a time when most people working for Radio One shared his insecurity, he was one of the few people on the air whose position was never seriously threatened. Peel's program had always been held up by the management as an example for its willingness to takes the

kinds of risks that commercial radio operators would not and could not copy for financial reasons.

Peel was largely in agreement with the criticisms of Radio One that had engendered the changes, and his initial response to the programming Bannister introduced was overwhelmingly supportive. The decision by Bannister and Dann that the best way for Radio One to compete with the commercial stations was to focus on “new music” played to Peel’s strength as a programmer (Hendy, 2000). In 1994, shortly after that decision, Dann announced that Radio One would no longer play any records made before 1990. The goal, articulated by Bannister, was “to take risks with new talent and new music and [to] ignore the bottom line in favor of a major cultural public service” (quoted in Garfield: 1998: 110). As that statement suggests, Bannister was unconcerned that Radio One would likely lose a substantial portion of its audience to its commercial competitors. This view of Radio One was in line with Peel’s Reithian philosophy of broadcasting as a public service.

In a 1994 interview in *Billboard* magazine Bannister outlined his uncompromising vision for the network. Having established earlier in the interview that he wanted to “send a signal to people that things [are] changing [on Radio One],” he made it clear that he wanted the network to lead, not follow, the audience:

We’re here to be a complementary service to that commercial market not to compete head-on with it. That’s not to say that we don’t want to develop the next original popular formats....We want to have the new ideas here....[I]t is important that we deliver these high-minded purposes to as substantial an audience...as we can. But I will be happy to be judged on the support of new bands...on the number of unsigned bands that we put on, and also on the range of music we play (Duffy, 1994).

Bannister could have been describing Peel's program, so it was hardly surprising that in early 1994 Peel applauded the changes at the newly named 1FM in his column in the

*Radio Times*:

The new 1FM, built on footings dug by Johnny Beerling, has contrived to sound different without sounding as though it is being different for the sake of being different, if you see what I mean, and the respect, even affection, for the listener which is the best thing that Mark Radcliffe...and others have brought to the station, has been the provider of an atmosphere that has encouraged veterans such as Steve Wright and Nicky Campbell to reinvent themselves (quoted in Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 416-17).

But while Peel was enthusiastic in his praise for the revamped station, he was always aware, despite assurances to the contrary, that he might lose his job, as so many others had when Bannister took over in what became known as "the night of the long knives" (Nightingale 2007). As he told a reporter several years later, "Matthew [Bannister] has always been very kind to me, and said that as long as he's controller there will always be a John Peel program....Unfortunately, he said the same thing to Johnnie Walker, and he departed Radio One only a few months afterwards" (quoted in Garfield 2005: 68).

Bearing out his skepticism was the fact that from October 1993 management had steadily cut his time on the air. Between January 1984 and September 1990 his program had aired consistently from 10 until midnight three nights a week. In September 1990 it was moved to a later slot (11p.m. to 2 a.m.) on Saturday and Sunday nights. In March 1992, it occupied the same slot on Friday and Saturday nights. In October 1993, it was moved again. And while it remained on from 11 p.m. until 2 a.m. on Friday nights, the second program aired on Saturday afternoon from 4:30 until 7. A year later, in November 1994, the Saturday afternoon program was reduced to two hours. Peel was beginning to feel as if his program was slowly being phased out (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 419). But he

would not let his manager, Shurley Selwood, intercede with the management on his behalf. According to Selwood, “His fear was they’d call his bluff, he’d lose his show and wouldn’t be able to get as much air time anywhere else to play new bands and sessions, which was all he really cared about” (quoted in Garner 2007:145).

Nevertheless, in 1996, he did write to Bannister to make a case for his contributions to the network over the years and argue for the continuation of his program. Far from being complacent about his position at the network after nearly 30 years on the air, he had begun to view his longevity as something of a liability, despite the fact that he had been recognized as “Broadcaster of the Year” in 1993 at the annual Sony Radio Academy Awards. It was particularly ironic that a man who had spent his career with the BBC embracing the endlessly turning tides of popular culture suddenly faced the possibility that he might be swept aside in the rush to embrace the future. In his letter to the controller he noted that,

As you may have noticed over the past few years, I have enthusiastically supported in thought, word and deed, the many changes you and your team have made to Radio One. I did this, not out of any thought of self-preservation, but because I believed the changes were very much needed. No-one doubts, I think, that Radio One is a much better station now than it was in the last days of Beerling. Last summer, our son, William, gently pointed out that part of the policy I was endorsing included the gradual reduction of my hours on the radio....

When you came to Radio One, it was with, amongst other things, ringing endorsements of the type of programming practiced by Andy Kershaw and myself. Andy was overjoyed. I advised caution, knowing that such attitudes can change overnight, particularly when there is so much critical hostility to the changes....

There does seem to be a new orthodoxy in the air, one which supports narrowly focused programs rather than the broadly based one built on the if-you-don’t-like-this-record-wait-until-you-hear-the-next-one principle.



Over the years my programs have often been the first to play music which subsequently found a wider audience and, very occasionally, a niche on Radio One.

He went on to outline some of the various styles of music (e.g. reggae, punk, hip hop, drum 'n' bass, jungle, electronica) he had been the first to play on Radio One, noting that the network, under Bannister, had begun introducing programs that focused exclusively on the various sub-genres that had been a mainstay of his program.

I hope you understand this. There remains in me, I suppose, something of the old hippie and something of an evangelical fervor about the work I do. I think—and I hope this isn't going to read wrong—that the programs on which I have worked...have contributed to the enduring health of British music and the capacity of that music to reinvent itself....It would be disappointing, in the event of one or other of these being really popular, to lose yet another hour so that you could schedule time for programs devoted to it.

Think of my programs as your research department. Noisy, smelly, but occasionally coming up with the formulae which you can subsequently market (quoted in Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 419-420).

Peel's "evangelical fervor" was the foundation of his remarkably consistent persona, which worked both externally (with listeners) and internally (with his colleagues and management) to help him maintain his position at the network, albeit with the help of Andrews, Walters and others. Walters was regularly called upon to argue for Peel's continued relevance. Peel maintained that relevance by always striving to be, as he suggested in the letter, one step ahead of most of his listeners and many of his colleagues at Radio One. Peel's catholicity had been his greatest strength as a programmer. Peel's one regret about his impassioned embrace of punk was that he had allowed that one style of music to dominate the program. Now he had to come to terms with the reality that Bannister and Dann were changing Radio One's programming philosophy to reflect the

less-than-catholic tastes of its target audience in the 1990s. Popular music had become increasingly splintered, a process that had begun in the late 1960s and Peel's early programming had reflected the split that served to distinguish his program as an alternative to the rest of the programming on the fledgling network. Ironically, Peel was being displaced by the very model he had helped create.

Peel's Reithian belief in stylistic catholicity and in challenging his listeners' perceptions—beliefs that had led to his embrace of each successive sub-genre in popular music—had left him without a clear identity on a network increasingly composed of tightly focused “specialist” programs. For two decades Radio One had responded to the challenge of attracting a divided audience by splitting the station between mainstream programming during the day, and the so-called “specialist” programming, spearheaded by Peel, in the evening. But in the mid-1990s, when the network began to embrace the styles of music Peel had so passionately championed for the previous decades, he had to find an argument to support his “generalist” approach.

This paradox put Peel in an interesting position. Having spent much of his career justifying what he had been playing, he was now faced with the task of having to defend his position as a tastemaker who was not only responding to, but molding the tastes of his teenage listeners. At the same time, as Lycett noted, if Radio One was to draw a younger audience, it needed to put younger people on the air. At the time he wrote to Bannister, Peel was in his mid 50s. One option open to him was to move to Radio Two, as many of his former colleagues had done. But for Peel the idea was anathema; it would have meant broadcasting to a different audience. He would no longer be talking to teenagers interested in new music. As his wife, Sheila, noted in the section of his autobiography she

completed, “He saw his role as always offering something new” to an audience willing to embrace the largely unfamiliar music on his program. (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 427). He had built his reputation and his persona as an outsider always ready to embrace change. He saw Radio Two as a network for listeners who want predictability.

Peel, as Walters observed, may have had the insatiable appetite of a teenager who has just discovered a passion for music.

His love of records is pathological. If he went down the Amazon he'd get the guy to pull the canoe over to see if there was a record store somewhere in the rain forest. When he and I went on a joint honeymoon with our wives to Egypt, I was a bit jumpy about going outside the hotel gates, but Peel took his missus and took a cab to the center of Cairo to find a record shop. To this day he has no idea what those records he bought were. But he can't stop himself (quoted in Hoskyns 1999).

But it was his persona that allowed him to maintain his connection with successive generations.

Peel had developed a persona that had identified his program as the place to hear “new music” in the 1970s and 1980s, a period when only a few DJs on the network were willing to take a chance on playing new, untested music. Peel’s reference in his letter to Bannister to his creation of “formulae you can market,” would at first glance appear to be a capitulation to everything he abhorred about the commercial process, and the marketing of music. But, in fact, Peel was referring to the survival of the network. If the network wanted to be considered a “cutting edge” force in popular culture, Peel argued, it would make sense for Radio One to retain the services of a man who had managed to stay on the edge of popular culture for more than 25 years.

One of Peel’s essential strengths was that he was an excellent salesman who had both an almost pathological belief in his product (“In a less enlightened world he might

have been locked up,” as Lycett (2007) put it). Another was his ability to maintain the kind of connection with his listeners that gave him the credibility to persuade them to at least sample his wares. In the end it was that carefully developed persona that secured his position at the network. It cemented his relationship with his listeners, which in turn convinced Bannister that Peel was, as Lycett suggested, “unfireable” (Lycett 2007). As Bannister evidently realized, it was all very well to say you are going to play “new” music, but for that kind of risky programming to succeed credible DJs were needed to present it, and Peel had long since established his credibility with the audience for the network.

In 2001 Louise Kattenhorn took over as the producer for Peel’s Radio One program. Her characterization of his rapport with his audience in the 21<sup>st</sup> century suggests that little had changed since the late 1960s when he was working for Radio London. It was paradoxical in that although it was born of parasocial relationships, because Peel refused to acknowledge his position as a celebrity or even as a notable public figure, it often developed into something that transcended the medium. As she explained,

[T]here was definitely a community of music lovers listening. It’s not really a clique, or a scene, it’s people who share a love of music. It’s really difficult to talk about John now in hindsight, now that there’s been this kind of huge...wave of national grief....[W]hen I was working with him, although he would get recognized in the street, and it was exciting, and people would say, ‘Ooh look, there’s John Peel,’ he was venerated privately. There wasn’t this sense of how great he was...[I]t’s only now become apparent how much impact he had on people, and I don’t think even he realized at the time how much impact he had on people because he had very personal connections with people....

He kept little postcards from listeners, and he’d talk all the time about friends and I’d say, ‘Oh, how did you meet him?’ And he’d say, ‘Well, he was just a listener. He used to send me postcards, and so I started sending him postcards back.’ It was always a very genuine relationship with

people. It wasn't just him saying, 'Oh I've got another letter from a fan, and I'm just signing a picture of myself and sending it back to him.' He would genuinely read someone's letter and respond to it, and send them a postcard back, and just say, 'Thanks for your letter. I really enjoyed reading it. Hope the exams go well. All the best, John.' It went beyond the radio (Kattenhorn 2007).

While on the road with Peel, Lycett also witnessed the bridges Peel built with listeners who regarded him as a treasured friend:

I remember we'd be in the pub in the break between the rehearsal and the transmission, and people would just come up to him, purely fans, but not fans in the way of 'Can I have your autograph?' People would just come up, totally unassumingly, and just say, 'It is John Peel, isn't it?' You know we were sitting having a pint chatting, and he'd sort of say, 'Um.' And they'd say, 'I just wanted to say thank you for making my life so much more pleasant,' shake his hand, and walk away again. I mean I can't tell you the number of times...and it was just sheer fans wanting to express friendship, you know what I mean? It wasn't fans wanting, as I say...and the number of times that happened, you know, he was regarded as a legend. And, of course, then you begin to think of the generations of kids, teenagers, that he must have had that kind of impact on (Lycett 2007).

Interestingly, he managed to maintain his connection with successive generations of listeners through his Radio One programs despite the fact that the network's target audience was (at that point) younger than his children—young enough, in fact, to be his grandchildren. As Kattenhorn observed:

I've read qualitative research that suggests that our audience was the widest audience for any show on Radio One. We had the youngest listeners, we'd have 12 and 13-year-olds listening late at night in the same way people had done for years and years, under the covers; and then we'd have the original kids who had been listening under the covers still listening. They'd go through phases of not listening, and then they'd email in again and say, 'Oh, I haven't listened to you in about three months, but I'm back again and really enjoying the show' (Kattenhorn 2007).

Peel, according to most of the people who knew and worked with him, had always been an introverted man, who was drawn to the flamboyant "wild men" of rock who were

comfortable being the center of attention. Like any fan, he was drawn to them at least in part because they embodied a role he would have liked to have played. But, ironically, it was his shyness that made him such a successful broadcaster. He had trouble opening up to people face-to-face, but from the security of a broadcast booth he was able to establish an intimate connection with his listeners that only a few other broadcasters have been able to match.

Bannister recognized Peel's iconic persona and its value in conferring credibility on the beleaguered network. Fortunately, Peel's suspicion that he was being embraced by a man holding a knife at his back proved to be largely unfounded. Nevertheless, according to Kattenhorn, Peel remained suspicious and was always expecting a pink slip in his mailbox. "I think he never lost that sense of feeling incredibly lucky to be doing what he was doing. I don't think he ever took it for granted that he was able to play just whatever records he wanted to on the radio. It was always that idea of, 'I can't believe they haven't cottoned on yet!'" (Kattenhorn 2007).

Living on the edge throughout his career, Peel told a reporter in 1998, had made him better at his job (Garfield 1998: 257). However, if he had not had such a secure private life, it seems unlikely that he would have been able to cope with what he perceived as such a tenuous position in his career for so long. According to Kattenhorn, a regular visitor at "Peel Acres,"

Sheila was John's rock. They pretty much had a dream relationship, it really was. They complemented each other so well. I don't think there would have been John without Sheila. Sheila's hugely important in his development...partly because he was an incredibly shy man and Sheila...having a home life with Sheila and having children with Sheila, allowing him to open up that home to bands and to people he met along

the way that was really important as well. If he hadn't had that stability, he wouldn't have been to do all that he did (Kattenhorn 2007).

In addition to the support of his family, he also had the support of his colleagues on the third floor of Egton House, the building housing Radio One. It was divided internally between the DJs and producers for the "mainstream" daytime programming whose offices were on the fourth floor, and the "specialist" music producers and DJs on the third floor. According to Lycett, that division was never by design, but the physical separation mirrored the philosophical division within the network.

We had the two floors, with about six or eight offices on each floor, I suppose. And, as far as I know, more by accident than design, that's how it came down. I don't think it was the original intention to have the riffraff on the fourth floor producing the pop and pap, so to speak, and the intellectuals with their ground-breaking pioneering shows thinking beautiful thoughts on the third floor. I don't think that it was ever planned like that. I think it just sort of happened, and obviously, I suppose, as people came to develop and formulate their own directions and their own allegiances, people tended to gravitate like that (Lycett 2007).

Ironically toward the end of the 1990s and in the first few years of the new century, it was Peel, having spent much of his career convinced that his most recent program had been his last, who was protecting his younger, insecure colleagues.

He was such a...pillar, literally...I promised myself not to use clichés...but he was that pillar of strength. He was very courageous, not just in the music he played, but in himself in terms of his politics, the BBC...he would stand up for people...and speak his mind which most of us were terrified to do. He would do it on behalf of people he worked with, and they were really grateful for that because they wouldn't dare, they'd be terrified of losing their jobs. He obviously got to the point where he said, 'Oh, I don't give a f—k anyway, so I'm going to say it' (Nightingale 2007).

By the end of the 1990s, Peel's iconic persona assured his autonomy at Radio One. His program had been revitalized with the help of new young producers (first Alison

Howe, then Anita Kamath, and finally, for the last three years of his career, Louise Katterhorn). And, beginning in November 1998, with the support of Andy Parfitt, a new controller who recognized Peel's talents and sought to correct the course Bannister had charted for the network, Peel was back on the air three nights a week. Unlike Bannister, who had ripped "the plaster [band aid] off in one go," as Katterhorn put it, Parfitt introduced changes incrementally (Katterhorn, 2007). As she stated,

Andy has made very decisive changes gradually, but I think Andy's strategy is not looking for a perfect station; he's moving as things change in the outside world....[P]art of the strategy of Radio One now is to be flexible. If you put a show on and in six months it's not working you have the flexibility to change it. There have been several presenter changes and schedule changes across daytime and specialist since I've been here, but it's something I've got used to because the way it's presented to us is that Radio One is evolving and it will be constantly changing. It's not going to remain static, and people are going to move on (Katterhorn 2007).

The reality at a pop music network like Radio One is that change is truly the only constant, and Peel had managed to remain one step ahead of the changes throughout his career. But earlier in 1998, Peel had begun to realize the rewards of his efforts to challenge himself as a broadcaster on Radio Four, which had a very different culture from that of Radio One. The audience for Radio Four is older, more conservative, and very uncomfortable with change (Parker 2007).

Peel had written and presented three short-term (six-week series) programs for the network, and the new controller for Radio Four, James Burke, wanted him to have a higher profile on that network. In April 1998, Peel began hosting and writing a regular weekly program for Radio Four, known as the "senior network." In this instance it was not his skills as a music programmer that had secured the position, but his writing.



The challenge for him was to work out a way to maintain his persona on a network with a different mode of presentation and a very different audience. However, in practice, his style of presentation and his persona on Radio One remained essentially unchanged on Radio Four. The essence of his persona was expressed on both networks, as it was in his writing, through his idiosyncratic use of language. Harry Parker, a BBC producer who had worked with Peel as a producer on Radio One in the 1970s, and as the senior producer for *Home Truths* on Radio Four, saw his work on the two networks as very similar in that respect.

He certainly used the same kind of language. He had a certain turn of phrase.... He would quite often use very complicated expressions like, 'Not totally dissimilar to...' that kind of thing. I think that had quite a profound influence on the way people speak, actually. I think if anybody popularized those slightly arcane ways of speaking it was Peel. There was a certain kind of sentence construction pinched from *Biggles* books or the Bible. A good example of his use of Biblical language was when we did a story about a family whose name was Cross. I remember him writing the script that day and the first paragraph started off: 'When I survey the wondrous Cross family...' he would quite often use those kind of semi-quotations from sources you wouldn't normally associate with somebody who was championing the latest punk band. They'd come from very conventional, establishment type sources...like the Bible or *Ripping Yarns of Boyhood Adventure* that kind of thing rather than underground magazines or the music press. His style was unique. He spoke like that, as well; he didn't just write like that, he actually spoke like that (Parker 2007).

Before comparing his use of language to develop and maintain his persona on the two networks it will be helpful to briefly examine his writing in a variety of print publications beginning in the late 1960s. It was his persona as expressed in print that led to his position as a writer and presenter for Radio Four.

## Peel in Print

In Peel's final school report from Shrewsbury school, one of his teachers, R.H.J. Brooke, wrote presciently, "It's possible that John can form some kind of nightmarish career out of his enthusiasm for unlistenable records and his delight in writing long and facetious essays" (BBC 2005). Talking to Sue Lawley on the BBC radio program *Desert Island Discs* in the late 1980s, Peel called Brooke "the greatest man I ever met." An apparently tolerant man, he didn't hold out much hope for the young Ravenscroft academically, "he recognized...that I was a fairly hopeless case," but he did encourage his young charge in his acts of minor rebellion against the stuffy conservatism of the school. "He put me in the study next to the house library where they used to listen to classical music in rather solemn circumstances and he encouraged me to play very noisy records in my study next door, he rather liked the idea of having a disruptive influence in the house" (Lawley 1990).

Bearing out his housemaster's prediction, by the late 1960s Peel had not only managed to develop a career playing his "unlistenable records, he also had begun writing for the first of many publications in the U.K. He began writing a regular column in the counterculture papers *IT* and *Oz* in 1967, and within a year he was also writing for the music weekly *Disc and Music Echo*. In the early 1970s, he began writing for another music weekly, *Sounds*. One of his first columns for *Sounds* in the summer of 1973 exemplifies the first shift in his idiosyncratic style.

As the revolutionary air-cooled thrust dampers with the Auftekrantz Special turbo-pinions bit into the morning air and the snarling drivers of Escorts and Firenzas were left standing as the needle hovered around the 140 mark, I knew that the brute Von Rausch would no longer terrorize

innocent fishermen answering their ancient calling along the coast of the Mediterranean.

Do I have you attention? Good. Jolly good. (Peel 1973: 11).

Despite such quixotic literary asides, for the most part his columns always appeared to be extracts from his diary. His style was a pastiche of the writing of authors who wrote for a largely schoolboy readership in the 1930s and 1940s (e.g. W.E. Johns and Richmal Crompton) and *Beachcomber*, the nom de plume for journalist J. B. Morton, whose column “By The Way” appeared in the *Daily Express* for more than forty years beginning in 1924 (Morton 1963: 3). Writing about *Beachcomber*, Peel described his pieces as “surreal comic writing...that we Britons believe to be uniquely British, but [that] is almost certainly universal” (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 124). Fans of *Monty Python’s Flying Circus* and Michael Palin, one of Peel’s classmates at Shrewsbury, will recognize Morton’s influence in the anarchic *Python* humor, which is quintessentially British, and yet found a very enthusiastic audience in America. But *Beachcomber* is almost completely unknown in America, and largely forgotten in Britain. His writing style is redolent of another age long since disappeared. For example, this is a short extract from one of many stories he wrote about a judge, Mr. Justice Cocklecarrot.

Cocklecarrot always refers to his retiring and very silent wife as Mrs. Justice Cocklecarrot. For the first eight years this raised a wan smile on her face, but the joke has worn thin, and he gets no encouragement when he trots out the phrase....And she, the source of the phrase, sits as impassible as a lump of earth...taking no part in any conversation. Which explains why the servants were recently staggered to hear her say suddenly, in a loud, clear voice, to her lord and master: ‘Wivens fell down a manhole on Christmas Eve.’ Cockelcarrot...turned in astonishment, gazed at his wife, said, ‘Thank you, my love...’”(Morton, 140-141).

Peel loved language. His imitation of the work of writers who were popular before the Second World War gave his writing an air of Edwardiana which was so

fashionable in the late 1960s as reflected in the fanciful “Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band.” It was a style rarely seen in the popular press by the time Peel began writing in the late 1960s. But, along with his radio programs, it helped him create the image of one very much of his time, and yet a man apart—reinforcing his insider/outsider persona. For Selwood, his columns are “like a really great overview of music and rock over the period and changing lifestyles” He had suggested to Peel at one point that he should anthologize his pieces, but he was not very keen on the idea. He told Selwood, “I’d be too embarrassed for all that blue skies and poetry...I find that very embarrassing now” (Selwood 2007).

But by the time he had begun writing for *Sounds*, the wistful flower power whimsy of the late 1960s (largely in the alternative press) had been replaced by his developing “laddish” persona, albeit filtered through the familiar Pythonesque whimsy exemplified in this passage from his column for *Sounds*.

If it wasn’t already too late to do so, I would start by telling you—and you alone—the sensational, sexsational news that I have decided to do no more personal appearances, but will concentrate my manifold energies in future to the cinema....

You will no doubt remember my work as Scotty in ‘Banjos Over The Transvaal’—and as the meringue in ‘The Corpse Is Not For Eating....’(11).

He concluded the column by promising that “[T]here will be times...when this column is actually about something,” and successive columns did include concert and record reviews, but largely they were rambling pieces about his life on the road. According to Sheila, he spent most of his time throughout the 1970s, when he was not on the air at Radio One, “ping-ponging around the country’s polytechnics and universities” (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 241).

But in the 1980s, as his family grew larger and his commitments at Radio One began consuming more of his time, he spent less time on the road. His writing for several of the national daily papers, including *The Times*, *The Observer*, and *The Guardian*, as well as *The New Statesman* reflected the changes in his life. For example, in his column for *The Observer* in the 1980s, while he still frequently wrote about music, he often focused on performers he did not like. Writing for a mainstream audience, he frequently took delight in skewering pop music icons of the era. Often reflecting his abiding distaste for the glamour and affectations of commercial popular culture, his reviews were filled with pithy one-liners. As in this excerpt from a review of a concert featuring Madonna in the Wembley Arena in August 1987, in which he began by quoting another journalist who was apparently equally unimpressed with the popular singer. "Two-dimensional," suggested the *Guardian*'s man at the Madonna concert at Wembley. 'As good as that?' I muttered to my wife."

Writing about Dire Straits, a group he liked, he reiterated his feeling that the kind of unquestioning audience acclaim he and Walters had received earlier in the decade (see Chapter 6) dulled any performer's edge. "Sometimes the music became so lush that I felt as though I was being force-fed Swiss roll (sponge cake)." His dismissal of a performance by The Pretenders was equally withering. "The music was dogmatic and humorless and the consumers, still standing but almost motionless, amused themselves by punching balloons about in a thoughtful manner, while otherwise behaving as though attending a lecture on the inland waterways of Belgium" (Peel 2004).

But he also took the opportunity to write a positive review of a performance by Shirley Bassey, a singer who would seem to embody all of the show business values he abhorred.

Emotions here are painted in primary colours, five-litre cans of reds and blues flung heartily at the canvas. Nothing, but nothing, is understated. With arms outstretched and other movement limited to throwing back the head or a self-deprecating wiggle of the hips, the Welsh thrush radiates a preposterous intimacy, scampering through a routine with which everyone seems totally familiar and at ease. To have attempted anything other than surrender would have been churlish (Peel 2004).

While the pieces he was writing in the 1980s were still frequently about music, by the 1990s he had begun to write more about his life in a rural village, as well as the pleasures and the frustrations of parenthood. This excerpt from his column for *The New Statesman*, tellingly titled “Diary,” exemplifies both the shift in subject matter and the consistency in his approach to writing.

The night before last, I was walking the dogs and had just turned for home when from a clump of trees to my right came this terrible cry, as though a grown man was aping the screaming of a baby. My blood froze. I had assumed previously that this blood freezing, beloved of writers of stirring tales for boys, was the merest flight of fancy. It turns out to have near scientific accuracy. The awful cry was repeated, happily further from where I stood rooted, I'm afraid, to the spot. The only dog, of three, that hadn't shot off homeward was similarly rooted. A veterinarian, had there been one on hand, would, I think, have confirmed that the dog too was experiencing freezing of the blood (Peel 1997).

The first time he wrote about his children was in a column for *Sounds* in 1975, when the first of his four children, William, was born. It was, he noted, a difficult birth.

What with one thing and another, he was steered out with a pair of pliers whilst his mother was unconscious, and sped straight away into an incubator from the doctor's gore-stained workbench. However, both parties seem to have recovered from the ordeal pretty well, although the Pig walks with circumspection, and William still looks rather more like Edward G. Robinson than either me or her. I have spoken, privately, to

some of our more observant neighbors and they have all assured me that they haven't seen Edward G. loitering around the area at all, at least, not during the past twelve months (quoted in Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 351).

The piece proved to be a precursor for his writing in a column in the *Radio Times* (the BBC's television and radio listings magazine) in the 1990s in which he wrote almost exclusively about his experience as the father of four children.

He began writing the column in 1995. When the editor asked Peel to write for the magazine he had apparently envisioned Peel delivering his pithy opinion of the week's television programming, but Peel was more interested in writing about his family. The column combined his commentary on the programming with his ruminations on parenting. A movie set in World War Two, for example, prompted him to reflect on the value of "National Service."

Our children have, when I have blocked their exit from the room and told them National Service stories, often involving marching, counter-marching and several costume changes, found these as incredible as my accounts of having been beaten at school. 'I just wouldn't have let them do it, Dad,' they have said, and I don't think they would...I believe in the long run, that that independence will stand them in better stead than conscription ever would (Peel 2002).

As with all his writing, the column was frequently as much about Peel as anything or anyone else. This extract from a column in which he reviewed *Fifties and Sixties in Living Color* exemplifies his focus.

In the fifties and sixties young people were, as the old joke has it, revolting, but I was too timid a teenager to carry my own post-adolescent revolution any further than the bedroom door. In fact, my dad was so worried about my lack of social skills that he once said, in a memorably Edwardian phrase, that he would give me a GBP 5 note if I came home and told him I had got a barmaid pregnant (Peel 2001).

He concludes the piece, nominally about a series of programs upcoming on the rival commercial channel, by expressing the hope that Lonnie Donegan will be included in one of the programs. “Although not exactly written out of the histories of the period, Lonnie is seldom given the credit he deserves for being an agent of change” (Peel 2001). More than anything, the columns were a means for him to connect with his listeners in a way he could only suggest on the music programs on Radio One. The print pieces helped him flesh out his broadcast persona. All of his writing, from his columns for the counterculture press in the 1960s to those for the *Radio Times*, was of a piece. It was, in effect, his diary, a self portrait mirroring the world through his experience. He always wrote about his life in terms of the music he loved, but as his life became more settled, his frame of reference increasingly centered on his family. It was his columns on his children in the *Radio Times* that prompted the producers at Radio Four to invite him to work with them on a series of programs about parenting. The series was called *Offspring*. Its success led to Peel being offered a regular slot on Radio Four as the writer and presenter for a program called Home Truths.

### **Home Truths**

Home *Truths* was, on the face of it, the antithesis of his Radio One program. It was aimed at a much older audience, and other than the theme tune by Dick Dale, “Let’s Go Trippin’,” it was a program without music that focused on the “minutiae of family life” (Parker 2007). Broadcast on Saturday mornings from 9 until 10, it was a program that people either loved or hated. One who hated it was a journalist, who, following news of the show’s cancellation in 2005 in the wake of Peel’s death, wrote:



As various Sony awards and ratings figures attest...there's no accounting for poor taste. Millions of lost souls tuned in religiously, weekend after weekend, to hear John Peel destroy anew a reputation for cynical drollery at the weekend which seemed to grow back, like Prometheus's liver, each week on Radio One, where he was still introducing students, junkies and overgrown adolescents of all ages to live sessions from the avant-garde likes of Boutros Boutros-Ghali And The UN Touchables.

How Peel could make the transition from his beloved *Teenage Kicks* to the Middle-Aged Kek that defined this smugfest I will never understand. But he did.... (Norman, 2005).

But another critic, Paul McCann, apparently spoke for many in the audience when he described the program as “an exploration of the ordinary...[roaming] over the terrain of domestic life, nudging gently at the minutiae of the world to uncover wonderful real stories....”(McCann 1998). The split between the program’s critics in the press mirrored the split in the Radio Four audience.

Peel first began working for Radio Four on a program based on family life conceived by three female producers at the network. In 1994, all three had returned to work after having taken maternity leave. Cathy Drysdale, one of the producers, said that having children had changed their entire outlook on life, and they wanted to create a program that took an edgier approach to discussing family life, talking less about the practicalities of parenting, and more about the experience. “We felt that there was nothing on Radio Four that really spoke to us in that way. We didn’t want to hear things about nappies [diapers] or any of the practicalities; it was more about family life, really” (Drysdale 2007).

Their first challenge was finding a presenter for the program. One of their colleagues suggested Peel. He had read his columns in the *Radio Times* and thought Peel would be ideal. For his part, according to Drysdale, Peel was bemused by the invitation

and although he was anxious about hosting the show, he agreed. They created a pilot for the half-hour show called *Offspring* and played it for Radio Four's controller, Michael Green, who liked Peel more than he liked the program, according to Drysdale. Green pressed the producers to work on improving the content of the program, and they continued to push for airtime. After they had spent some time fine-tuning the content, six half-hour programs were commissioned and scheduled to air at 7:20 on Saturday evenings. Despite the scheduling, (according to Drysdale, Radio Four posts its lowest audience ratings of the week on Saturday evenings) the program was a success, and won a Sony Gold Award for the best "speech" program of the year in 1995. Two more six-week series were produced, and the program won a Sony Gold Award again in 1997 (Drysdale 2007).

As with all successful radio programming it reflected the culture. At the same time it provided a showcase for Peel to push the envelope because, according to Drysdale, his philosophy of fatherhood was just beginning to be widely embraced. As Drysdale sees it, family life in Britain was undergoing a profound transformation, and the program picked up on it.

I suppose seeing how important, how central the family is now, and men's roles within the family are so much more established, even more than it was ten years ago, and I think all of that was just starting for us personally. He'd always been like that, and so that was a sociological change as well (Drysdale 2007).

A year later, Drysdale contended, Radio Four's new controller, James Burke, wanted to "slightly alter the sound" of Radio Four, which has always been considered, along with Radio Three, as the "serious" side of the BBC. However, it does have a lighter side, as exemplified by one of the longest running, and most popular, programs on

the network, a daily serial about “the everyday lives of country folk” called *The Archers* (Martin 2007). Given the popularity of *The Archers*, it is perhaps not surprising that *Home Truths*, which detailed the everyday lives of “ordinary people,” as Drysdale put it, was a success (Drysdale 2007).

The program was given an extended running time of an hour in a “prime slot” in the schedule every Saturday morning at 9 because, according to Drysdale, the new controller wanted “a bigger, better vehicle for Peel” (Drysdale 2007). The content of the show was expanded from the stories about family life in the *Offspring* programs to a more general survey of life in the U.K. with pieces that ranged from the tragic to the absurd. Harry Parker, a senior producer for the program, conceded that the program could often be, as its critics claimed, concerned with trivialities:

I would say, ‘Well, one, you’re right, it is trivial and that’s what’s good about it, that’s the whole point.’ But then I’d say ‘It’s not always, and I’d point to some pretty serious stories that we had on the show.’ I mean, we had people who had gone to Switzerland to commit suicide, things like that. One of the guys who was in the tribute program, in the program that went out on the week following his death, was a guy who’d lost both arms, both legs, and his face in a terrible kind of flesh-eating disease. That’s not trivial, you know. The reason it worked was because Peel had done it so well (Parker 2007).

It took Peel and the producers some time to find a way to play to Peel’s strengths on the program. The biggest problem they faced was Peel’s innate shyness. The interviews for *Offspring* were conducted on location, which was quite a novel experience for his interviewees. “I’ll never forget we went to interview a very large family,” Drysdale recalled, “and they just couldn’t believe that the legend that was John Peel was in their sitting room, and he was completely delightful with them. Absolutely delightful; but he was very nervous about interviewing them” (Drysdale 2007).

When Harry Parker began producing *Home Truths*, he solved the problem by having Peel interview people, as he put it, “down the line.” What that meant was that Peel did not have to conduct the interviews face-to-face. His guests were invited into a BBC studio near their home, and a communications link would be set up between Peel in London and his interviewees. If it had not been possible to establish such inter-studio links, it is unlikely that Peel would have hosted the program for very long. He had a reputation for not being a very effective interviewer (see Chapter 5) but, as Parker discovered, he could be a very effective interviewer when he did not have to talk to people face-to-face.

As noted, there were times when Peel was asked to talk to people about delicate subjects. For example, he talked to one couple about their still-born baby, and on another he spoke to a woman about the unexpected death of her husband from lung cancer. He interviewed a man who, as a boy, had lost a friend who was killed by a motorist who knocked her off her bicycle. On other programs he talked to the mayor of a village in southern England about her experience as a *Playboy* playmate, a man who rode a scooter, but saw himself as Peter Fonda in *Easy Rider*, and a woman in her mid-eighties known as “The Steaming Granny” because of her passion for steam trains.

Peel “was fascinated by people and their stories,” said Parker (Parker 2007). But not everyone found the stories compelling listening. According to Parker, the program divided the Radio Four audience about evenly. For every person “who adored it, there were as many people who disliked it” (Parker 2007). Television critic Gillian Reynolds was, as she put it, an “unfan” of the program. “That ‘Let’s Go Trippin’” tune which introduces it drives me mad. I really and truly hate the program, always have” (Reynolds

2005). It was a largely innocuous program, and yet it proved to be as controversial as anything Peel had done in his career up to that point. His friend and colleague Andy Kershaw condemned it as ‘cloying, sentimental and indulgent,’ while John Walters, with his characteristic erudition, complained, “I do feel it's a bit like looking at other people's holiday snaps. I think it was Barry Norman,” he added, “who called it a naff-fest for people who wear sandals and live near Bigglesworth” (Hoskyns 1999).

Ironically, for Peel the program was perhaps his ultimate act of rebellion. From the days when he played “noisy records” in the study next door to the room where his classmates at Shrewsbury were listening to classical music, to his embrace of every outsider form of music from reggae to punk to hip hop on Radio One, Peel was forever railing against what he saw as the claustrophobic constrictions endemic to a class-conscious country. He originally changed his accent to affect the speech of blue-collar Liverpool and The Beatles, and although his mode of speech changed as he grew older, he never again spoke with the carefully enunciated, rounded vowels he had been trained to use as a child. *Home Truths* was Peel’s celebration of the celebrity of ordinary people. As Drysdale observed, “He was a lot more comfortable with the public than with the great and the good” (Drysdale 2007).

Contrary to Chignell and Devlin’s (2006) suggestion that Peel’s move to Radio Four “necessitated the creation of a new identity” (70), this study’s analysis of his persona as constructed in his on-air discourse on Radio One and Radio Four demonstrates the consistency of his identity on the two networks. It was not necessary for Peel to reinvent his persona for Radio Four because, as Parker pointed out,

Many of the listeners were in their 40s, 50s, or 60s, and would remember Peel from their teenage years. Plus he was a pretty well known guy. For all that he played minority interest music most of the time, he was on television and he wasn't unknown....Everybody -- it was the genius of his music side of things-- that everybody went through a Peel phase, you know, in their youth (Parker 2007).

As Parker suggests, “everybody” listening to *Home Truths* knew Peel; his persona was already familiar to many of his listeners. But being on Radio Four, where he had the opportunity to talk more than on Radio One, gave him an opportunity to develop and expand his persona more directly than in the ancillary medium of his print columns..

In this sense, the program was another way for Peel to develop his outsider/insider persona, in this instance tweaking the noses of those who would dismiss the lives of “ordinary” people as an inappropriate focus for a radio program, much as many of his critics had earlier dismissed his Radio One programs because he did not play the music made by established mainstream performers. Peel was interested in the margins of popular music, as he was in marginalized people generally, whether they were musicians or truck drivers. He had taken Reith’s democratic vision of public service broadcasting at face value, and in the process had turned the notion of who and what should be afforded airtime on its head.

As Drysdale observed, “ordinary” people were more interesting to Peel, who had little time for celebrities. He had also spent much of his career up to that point downplaying his own celebrity based on the belief that his listeners would be more likely to pay attention to him when he focused on them, rather than on himself. As the analysis that follows of his discourse on the programs on Radio One and Radio Four shows,

*Home Truths*, like his programs for Radio One, was essentially an on-going dialog with his listeners

### **Peel's Pop and Speech Personae**

Whether he was playing “his sort of music” on Radio One, or sharing his listeners’ stories on Radio Four, Peel was engaged in a conversation with his audience. As noted, many people listening to *Home Truths* had been a part of his Radio One audience, so for them it was like catching up with an old friend (Parker 2007). Listeners to his Radio One Program had a chance to catch up with edgy new popular music. Despite the radical difference in the content on the two programs, he talked to his listeners on both as if they were old friends and he had stopped by to share a drink and a chat.

This attitude is exemplified in his opening remarks from a Radio One program in September 1994. Following the first record, Peel’s opening comments sound more like a conversation with a friend than standard DJ patter: “Really irritating that....I don’t think there’s been a single review of this LP, either in the music weeklies or any of the magazines, or anywhere really, that I’ve seen” (September 23, 1994). This pattern is also evident in a 2002 show. Following the program’s first record, he began,

Well, tonight has been both exhilarating and infuriating. What do you do with a team that can beat Manchester United, but *nobody* else (his voice betraying his exasperation). That’s Cornershop on Ouija Records....(January 22, 2002).

Both instances suggest intimacy with the listener. In the second instance he assumes that his listeners know that he has been a fan of the Liverpool Football Club for most of his life and that the fortunes of the club are as important to him as almost anything else in his

life, including the music on his program. For someone joining the program for the first time his remarks might be incomprehensible. But they are, to use Goffman's terminology, an example of Peel's pervasive use of "self-reporting." According to Goffman:

[S]elf-reporting...has something to teach us about a fundamental feature of all speech, namely the continuous decisions every individual must make regarding what to report of his passing thoughts, feelings and concerns at any moment when he is talking or could talk (Goffman 1981: 295).

Peel's management of self-reporting is integral to the construction and development of his persona, which functioned to make the listener feel like an insider. He was not as concerned that every listener would catch the meaning of his remarks as he was with strengthening his bond with the listeners who joined him regularly. For Peel, it was a way of expanding the normally two-dimensional persona of a radio DJ to a more fully developed three-dimensional identity. The risk in doing this, of course, is that the listener might well take issue with something that is said, or, worse, have no interest in it at all. As Goffman noted, there is a very fine line between enough and too much self-revelation. "To do informal talk, is to walk a very narrow line, often with no appreciation of how carefully one is walking; it is to blithely use self-reports up to a point, and silently foreswear such autobiography thereafter" (Goffman 1981: 296).

Peel walked that "very narrow line" with remarkable consistency. Whether on Radio One or on Radio Four, he regularly engaged in "self-reporting" as a way of involving his listeners either directly or indirectly in the program. His approach often relied upon his listener's indulgence, and he apparently assumed they were willing to follow his lead. For example, in his introduction to a *Home Truths* program in March 2003, Peel begins by reading slowly and deliberately, "The junior officers exchanged



glances, Mrs. Bradshaw was on board again,” an introduction apropos of nothing, with nothing to do with the content of the program, more like an inside joke between friends (albeit explained later in his introduction). It assumes that many in the audience are regular listeners who understand Peel’s sense of humor and are willing to indulge him as his readers from *Sounds* to the *Radio Times* indulged his equally idiosyncratic asides in print. The format of *Home Truths*, more so than even the indulgently informal format of his music programs on Radio One, lent itself to Peel’s singular approach. But, according to Harry Parker, the program’s senior producer, Peel’s scripts would sometimes be much too long. His reaction to what he perceived as Parker’s occasional rejection of his scripts suggests that Peel had difficulty at times with the compromises essential to a scripted program. “He’d put out three pages of it and I’d tell him it’s too long, and he’d look very hurt and say, ‘Look, you’ve got all this stuff in here,’ and I’d say, ‘I know, John, but that’s the content, you know’?” (Parker 2007). Nevertheless, the program was very much a reflection of Peel’s carefully crafted broadcast persona.

His introduction to a March 2003 program is typical of his approach, and would sound immediately familiar to anyone who had read his columns or listened to his program on Radio One. With an editor’s guiding hand, the scripts he wrote for *Home Truths* were an ongoing dialog between Peel and his listeners, many of whom contributed to the program, as noted in his opening remarks.

I’ve decided to introduce each *Home Truths* for the time being with the opening lines from prominent literary works. In case the lines ‘The junior officers exchanged glances, Mrs. Bradshaw is on board again’ are not immediately familiar to you, they are the opening words in my autobiography. Unfortunately as of this date they are the only words in my autobiography. But I think you’ll agree that they make for a pretty promising start. Alas, Mrs. Bradshaw makes no further appearances in this

week's program, but a parrot with a potty mouth does. A parrot that is more familiar than is almost certainly healthy with the word 'knickers.' There's more this week on the West Country knicker mystery, and we'll meet a woman who associates names with foodstuffs, sort of. I am...believe or not...custard and chips with a side order of children's aspirin. And also featured this week are nothing...nothing...nutmeg, and yorkshire pudding with gravy. But first...in the reckless spirit that so defines these programs, I urged you last week to unburden your consciences after Chris Brooks did just that, and told us how he used his sister-in-law's toothbrush to clean his dog's teeth. Chris' misdeeds were born of the delicious innocence of youth, but Barbara Boyce's, which also involved toothbrushes, came from an altogether darker place (March 15 2003).

The story that followed turned on the use of her husband's toothbrush to clean the dog's teeth by a wife determined to wreak revenge on her husband for his "obnoxious" behavior.

As he noted in his introduction, there was more on an ongoing story concerning women's underwear strewn along a highway in a rural county in the south west of England ("The West Country Knicker Mystery"). Like the toothbrush story and many of the stories on this and every program, it originated with a listener. According to Parker (2007) it was not uncommon for Peel to pick up on an incidental detail during an interview asking the interviewee to elaborate, breaking away from the script. His listeners often responded in the same way, picking up on stray details, or peculiar stories, and adding to them with their own contributions.

He maintained a similar dialog with his listeners to the Radio One program which, with the advent of e-mail and text messaging in the latter part of the 1990s, came ever closer to a reciprocal conversation. Until then, as he had done since he'd been on Radio London, Peel largely relied on the mail for feedback from his listeners. It was not always positive or supportive. On a program broadcast in the fall of 1994, Peel had been going

through the mail while the music was playing. Following the tune, Peel gave the name of the performer and the title of the tune before turning to the mail.

And...uh...going through the mail as the record...as the tune...was playing, tapping my toes terrifically, I came across this: 'John Peel, delighted to hear on Radio Four, September the 14<sup>th</sup>, that you get threats from angry people when you play that nigger garbage called reggae. I don't believe in sending threats, I prefer to wait until ethnic cleansing breaks out all over Europe, not just Serbia, and then join in the battle to return Europe to the European Aryan *volk* (emphasis his). Europe will be better off when traitors are hanging out to dry. Sieg Heil.' That comes from a fan in Canterbury. Thank you very much for your letter, it was much appreciated (September 23, 1994).

Later on in the program, after playing a reggae record, Peel telegraphed his enthusiasm for the music by saying, "I expect you to love that to pieces, I certainly do." As noted earlier (see Chapter Six) while Peel's promotion of "outsider" music had helped him develop a clearly identifiable broadcast persona, it had also put him regularly at odds with his listeners. And yet his remarks suggest he was telegraphing his refusal to back down in the face of any attempt to influence his choices either by the management at Radio One or members of his audience. In fact, his disinclination to play to his audience's preconceptions was an essential component of his broadcast persona. "[Peel] didn't pretend to be playing what his audience wanted to hear which, aside from helping him remain relevant throughout his career, implied his personal respect for his autonomous audience" (Coolidge, Wright 2007: 16). His remarks in response to the listener's racist letter would tend to support that assertion. Peel, it seems, was largely unconcerned with the substance of the response, only that he had engendered one. It is also another example of what he meant when he told a reporter that he had spent his career "living on the edge" (Garfield 1998: 257). Not only was he never sure of his tenure

at the network, he was never assured that his audience would embrace his choices with the enthusiasm he invariably displayed for what some listeners, echoing R.H.J. Brooke, characterized as “unlistenable” (Coolidge, Wright 2007: 15).

There was very little “edge” in *Home Truths*. In fact, it was that perceived lack of edge in the program described by one critic as “cozy and domestic” (Burchill 1999) that led even some of his closest friends to wonder why Peel was associated with it. Peel was upset by the criticism from his friends, particularly. According to his wife in his autobiography, Peel was “aware that the material could sometimes be sugary or anodyne, and he tried to steer the show away from excessive whimsicality” (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 434). But, in fact, the philosophical foundation of the program was very similar to that of his Radio One programs in its freewheeling blend of substance and silliness. Sometimes, as in this introduction which does tend to contradict the notion that he tried to reduce the program’s “excessive whimsicality,” the program veered very close to the absurd:

Hello, and welcome to another *Home Truths*, a program little appreciated by my late, and frequently lamented, colleague, John Walters. Walters had, as most of us do, I suppose, a remarkable number of rather odd friends and acquaintances. Chief among these was a man known, for reasons I’ve long since forgotten, if I ever knew, as Mr. Cooker. Mr. Cooker, to hear Walters tell it, was a bit of a storyteller, albeit one who felt that if his story wasn’t getting a strong enough reaction was prepared to add, as it were, tartrazine, sunset yellow, or penso por a to heighten the coloring. Incidentally, I believe that tartrazine, sunset yellow and penso por a’s current hit, ‘Doing It, Doing It,’ has dropped a couple of places to number eight in the charts. Anyway...for example, Mr. Cooker drove a car that was not just fast, but to his certain knowledge, the fastest in Europe. He also claimed to know, for a fact, that men had killed themselves so that their children might win places at some superior school with special scholarships granted to orphans. We sometimes feel that there’s strong Cooker-ite faction amongst *Home Truths* listeners. In last week’s program, for example, Elaine Patterson told us of a photograph she had taken in

Cambodia of a pig on the back of a scooter. No sooner had we come off the air and closed the big old dented studio door and run screaming from the building than Paul Nathan got in touch. Paul had a photo too; his was taken in Uganda and is of a 150lb Nile perch on the back of a bicycle. I have the photograph here in front of me, and it is indeed rather startling. The fish is, alas, dead, and needs a bicycle like...like...well, (cut to a female voice) like a woman needs a man.

Peel: (resignedly) There's always one isn't there? (March 27, 2004).

His mock resignation is, of course, tacit recognition of the inherent whimsicality in much of the content. But, as Parker noted earlier, the program also featured very serious pieces that probed painful experiences. That same spirit was reflected in his Radio One programs where the music frequently moved from chaotic "speed metal" tracks often lasting less than a minute to sweetly melodic country music to reggae and hip-hop all within one half hour period.

Peel's carefully crafted persona was evident in every aspect of the program, even in the style used by listeners who contributed pieces to the program. Apparently influenced by Peel, they often used his arcane modes of self-expression in the pieces they submitted to the program. In this excerpt from a listener's essay, the style is notably close to Peel's own writing. Certainly this is far from the first instance of a DJ's discourse influencing his listeners' speech—popular DJs have always influenced their teenage listeners—but for listeners to begin using Peel's peculiarly arcane modes of expression, as Parker (2007) confirmed was often the case, suggests a powerfully appealing persona.

'Get your GCSE's out of the way,' I apparently declared some months ago, 'and I'll agree to you having your nose pierced.' So, exams safely behind her, my teenage daughter, Anna, began researching tattoo and piercing parlors in the East Anglian region with a fervor she singularly lacked as far as revising for American history was concerned (September 21, 2002).

The use of a simple declarative quote to open the piece is one example of Peel's apparent influence, as is the phrase "I apparently declared." But perhaps more telling is the use of the phrase "with a fervor she singularly lacked." It is redolent of the period before the Second World War when, at least in print, British middle and upper-class speakers would use that sort of convoluted construction in their day-to-day speech. It could be argued that it was effective with Peel's listeners for the same reason it apparently appealed to him; it was of a piece with his and their rejection of many aspects of the modern world as expressed in his opening remarks in a program from 2004:

Each week I arrive in our office on the eighth floor, my ample bosom heaving with optimism, a spring in my step, my eyes upturned toward the stars, certain that this week we will do great things together. Effect some sort of moral advance to match the technological advances that threaten to engulf us all, identify previously unidentified truths...(September 8 2004).

The language and the sentiments expressed are of a piece (i.e. reflecting an era when life was simpler, and the moral choices were clearer) in that excerpt which typifies his approach on the program. His inclusive language ("we will do great things together"), and his habit of, as it were, drawing back the curtain to reveal the inner workings of the program served to include his listeners in the construction of the program. Goffman referred to this as a "change of footing" (1981: 296-98). It was a device Peel used regularly on both programs as an effective way of subverting the natural barrier—what actors call the 'fourth wall'—separating the broadcaster and the listener. His expression of his distaste for "technology" and the "modern" world they represent goes back to the philosophy he espoused on his Radio London program.

Another way in which Peel used self reporting was in his frequent references to his family. He mentioned them frequently on both programs. In the last few years of his

life one of his programs for Radio One each week originated from his home in Sussex. These programs while perhaps testing his professionalism when the setting caused all concerned to abandon many of the formalities that a conventional radio studio tends to engender were yet another way of bringing his listeners into his world.

This exchange with Laura Cantrell, a country singer from New Jersey and a particular favorite of his, who was in his home for a Christmas program in 2003, is an example of the informality of these broadcasts:

Now that's what I call a country song. Bow Thayer, and 'Don't Play Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain.' And I should point out that in our house tonight there are some forty people or so, I think, and...uh...(chuckling) the drains are clogged. It's also rather hot in the house. It's not a big house, but very comfy, and particularly comfy tonight. And so...uh...once again, we're very pleased to welcome Laura Cantrell to our house and...well, entertain us (turns from the microphone) with whatever you're gonna do.

Ah, well thanks....We're so thrilled to be here—backed up drain, or no, you know, we have no complaints.

OK, well, that may not be the case come midnight (giggling in the background) but uh...anyway....(December 23, 2003).

As that exchange illustrates, the line between a radio program on a network with a worldwide reach and friends socializing together was often blurred on the programs broadcast from what he always referred to as “Peel Acres.”

He also regularly referred to e-mail messages and comments from his listeners in his last years on Radio One, which, as noted earlier, allowed him to bring his listeners into the program almost in real time. This practice functioned both to include them in the program as he did on Radio Four, and also to develop his persona. In the following example he reinforces his characterization of himself as an everyman:

Slightly puzzling e-mail from Dr. Kerry Wright in Cambridge. ‘Congratulations on winning Radio One’s “Most Attractive Male Voice” competition. Will you be able to live with the acclaim?’ Not really sure what you mean by that, Kerry, although Louise, the producer, did say something about the *Radio Times*, but I was apparently voted the 4<sup>th</sup> most attractive voice or something...anyway I don’t know what it’s all about. Much more important than that, an email from Patrick Fleming in Glasgow and it says, “I’m a big fan of the program. Can you please mention Melanie who gave birth to a lovely wee boy called Nathan on Sunday and tell her I love her so very much. A big shout out to Nathan’s brothers, Liam and...is it, Aden? Or Eden, or possibly even Iden, anyway keep playing all of those wide tracks. Best wishes and thanks, Patrick Fleming.’ So, congratulations to all concerned (January 22, 2002).

The comments about his voice and his celebrity are downplayed as much “less important” than the e-mail from another listener asking him to join in the celebrations for the birth of the listener’s daughter. Once again suggests that his listeners are the focus of the program, not him. He also interjects himself into the script of the e-mail, a technique as Goffman (1981) noted that allows the announcer to engage in a dialog with the listener within the text of the script.

But perhaps Peel’s most celebrated interactions with his listeners to the Radio One program turned on the innumerable records and tapes sent to him by young musicians hoping for Peel’s imprimatur. “Peel’s producers and friends at the BBC recounted multiple stories of how Peel was constantly being inundated with tapes...and how he worked hard to listen to every single one of them” (Coolidge, Wright 2007: 10). But it was an increasingly overwhelming task and as he told his listeners one night, even with the best will in the world he would never be able to listen to all of the tapes and records sent to him:

An email here from Dave of London, uh...he says you played a record by a Danish band called Glory Box and...uh...a very fine song it was. You said you’d got the LP, but you hadn’t had a chance to listen to it. Have you



had a chance to listen to it? Is there any chance of hearing another song from the album on your program? Well, uh, I've not had a chance to listen to it to be honest, Dave, and I shall be spending most of the weekend, as I spend most weekends, listening to records in order to put these programs together. It is one of those things, I know I whinge on about it all the time, but it really drives me nuts because I don't know what I can do about it. There are just *so many* records at home waiting to be...and not just an enormous number of records, but, you know, records that I'd obviously really like to hear. A lot of demos these days that are increasingly on CD disguised as records (chuckling) which is why a few of them have crept into the program. I do try and keep abreast of it all, but it is, frankly, impossible as I've said before. And when you add to that all of the emails that come in—how many emails are there awaiting our attention? (Off mike, 'I don't know'). Oh, well you're supposed to say 'thousands and thousands' because there normally are thousands in there, aren't there? I mean, 7 or 8000...I got a stropmy email here from Richard Skinner, he used to be a Radio One DJ once upon a time. (Affects an irritated voice) 'I sent you an email in January...' and you want to say, you know, 'Richard...when you sent it there was about another 8000 in there, that's why you've not had a reply to it.' And I do feel guilty about not doing this because, you know, it's what I'd like to be doing, and corresponding with people who send us emails, and getting to know each other *really* well, and having them come and stay, perhaps, who can say, but uh...it just can't be done and I don't know what to do about it. I can't file...I mean, I do need to file the records that are stacked up around the house at the moment so I can put my hands on them when I want to play them again when people say, 'How about that Glory Box LP?' and I can go G-G-G-G and here we go, Glory Box, and pull it out and listen to it and put a track in the program, and I can't...what do I do about it? Really? Die...or get an equerry. Not a single application to the job of equerry. Disappointing. Uh...anyway, I'm talking too much...where are we now? (January 22, 2002)

The reference in this excerpt to putting the program “together” makes it clear that although Peel's comments weren't scripted, the music played on the program was programmed in advance. His comments between the records were not scripted, as his comments between the pieces on *Home Truths* were, and yet it is very difficult to distinguish between his scripted and unscripted comments as the examples attest.

Goffman (1981) observed that even when DJs are extemporizing that they tend to

use “a relatively small number of set comments, much as it is said epic oral poetry was recomposed during each delivery” (324/25). Peel was articulate, but he did often repeat certain phrases. One of the most frequently repeated, and one used as the name for a fan’s website is “fades in slowly,” as in “this one fades in slowly,” a comment he felt the need to make whenever the record was not immediately audible following his introduction.

Goffman (1981) also observed that the announcer may qualify (“hedge,” in Goffman’s terminology) his remarks in an effort again to “self-dissociate himself,” as Goffman put it, because his remarks might imply pedantry, traditionalism, pomposity....” (286). It was a device Peel often used to undercut the potential distancing from the audience when he said something that identified him as an expert with an acute insight.

But the most notable features of Peel’s discourse were, as has been noted, his unusual syntax, and by the frequent shifts in his tone of voice which said as much as the words themselves. Writing about radio and the way it sparked a listener’s imagination, Susan Douglas noted that “[T]he act of listening...cultivates both a sense of national unity and, at the same time, a conspiratorial sense of subcultural difference, of distance from, even superiority to that national ethos” (Douglas 1999: 23).

Douglas was writing about radio in the 1920s in America, but her comments are equally true of Peel’s programs throughout his career with the BBC. Harry Parker worked with Peel on his programs for Radio One in the 1970s, and as his producer on *Home Truths*. He characterized Peel’s Radio One listeners as “much more of a club, a group of like-minded people who felt themselves to be slightly different from other people” (Parker 2007). The same could be said of his Radio Four audience. As Douglas suggested, radio confers the power to create a sense of “subcultural” unity among the

listeners of a program hosted by a broadcaster with a clearly identifiable persona. Peel's programs on Radio One and later on Radio Four, exemplify how a radio host and his/her programming may become so closely intertwined that it becomes almost impossible for listeners to separate one from the other.

As this chapter documents, in the latter phases of his career, Peel developed a broadcast persona of rare fluidity and universality, honed and expanded not only through decades of radio work, but through his writing and, it should be added, his regular appearances on British television (e.g. *Top of the Pops*). His voice and public persona were also familiar to many people in the UK through his frequent voice-over work. But while this corollary exposure may have made him a more familiar presence, it in no way predicted or explains the level of success he enjoyed on Radio Four.

It was, as Parker (2007) has stressed, "very unusual" for a Radio One DJ to make the "jump" to Radio Four. That Peel was able to move with relative ease between the two worlds of Radio One and Radio Four is an indication of the strength of his carefully crafted persona. As this chapter's analysis of Peel's on-air talk on both networks reveals, he consistently used many of the same modes of address on both networks, including, in Goffman's terms, "change of footing," "hedging," "self-reporting," and "interjection," as well as highly idiosyncratic syntactical structures and tonal shifts. In addition to these elements of persona construction, he went out of his way to make overt interaction with listeners a central part of both his Radio One and Radio Four programs, using letters and emails to pull them onto his public platform, while at the same time placing himself firmly in their worlds. What all of these characteristics of persona construction have in common, of course, is their function: to allow broadcasters to transcend the natural

barriers between them and listeners by creating the intimacy that is such a fundamental aspect of both radio and the parasocial relationships the medium engenders (Horton and Wohl, 1956).

That many of his listeners felt they had a personal relationship with Peel is indisputable. He genuinely liked people and was driven by a desire to help them express themselves through the stories they brought to Radio Four's *Home Truths*; he did the same for young musicians who wanted to express themselves through their music on his Radio One program. Over time his listeners came to trust him because of the authenticity and consistency of his persona over several decades. This dissertation's analysis of four decades of his work also supports the authenticity of his Reithian belief in the right of ordinary people to have access to the airwaves of the BBC, an international broadcast outlet. He consistently denied his own celebrity in order to assure his listeners that they were as important as he was in the construction of his radio programs. Over time his listeners came to trust in that affirmation and to reciprocate it. The resulting programs were much stronger because of their enthusiastic input as correspondents and as performers. This relationship with his listeners was at the heart of his success, and of his broadcast persona.

## Chapter Eight

### Conclusion: The Paradoxical Peel

Death, for those who live on, is the ending of a chapter rather than the end of a book, and although the dead may have no more part to play as characters, their influence may continue right through the story (John Peel, quoted in Gilbey 2005).

As the research and analysis presented in the previous chapters makes clear, Peel profoundly altered the programming on Radio One, helped shape the musical tastes of several generations of listeners, and resurrected the BBC's all-but-moribund commitment to public-service radio, recasting it to fit late-20<sup>th</sup>-century sensibilities. Conclusions as to how he managed these singular accomplishments, however, as well as their broader significance, prove both considerably more nuanced and interesting than this simple summation suggests. Was his success, as Peel himself suggested, the result of his "being in the right place at the right time" (Peel, qtd. in Coolidge and Wright, 2007)? Or was it the outsider, anti-DJ persona that he constructed that was responsible for his influence as a cultural intermediary in the UK for over four decades?

While each of these conclusions is valid in its own right, this study reveals a decidedly more complex interplay of forces at work in Peel's success at the BBC. Of these, his persona certainly played a central role. Yet what this work also demonstrates is the difficulty in separating out Peel's complex persona from several equally potent and interrelated factors contributing to his influence, including the mission, history and

unique characteristics of the BBC and Peel's complex, contradictory relationship with this venerable media institution.

The conceptual framework most useful in bringing together the threads of this research project is, in fact, that of *paradox*—which Edwins defines as “statements that fold in on themselves, that contradict themselves in such a way that they often simultaneously succeed and fail at representing the multifaceted, complex experiences they describe” (2001: 215). The very questions that gave rise to this study—including both those that sought insights on Peel's persona and those pertaining to his complex relationship with the BBC's management and bureaucratic structure—allude to the paradoxes inherent in Peel's persona. How, for example, did Peel construct and cultivate a highly authentic persona that was rife with internal contradictions (e.g., his dual roles as amateur/professional, fan/gatekeeper and rebel/traditionalist)? How did he develop and refine his on-air persona over time in such a way that allowed him simultaneously to attract both young and older fans? And perhaps most paradoxical of all, how did a middle-aged landowner and father from the upper-classes become a hero of the punk movement in the 1970s?

Research questions related to Peel's tenure at the BBC also point to paradox and contradiction. The most critical of these is how Peel, working within the conservative and elite BBC, managed to cultivate a global persona as an outsider and maverick who championed marginalized music and performers. That he not only kept his job at the BBC for almost four decades, but managed to revolutionize popular music radio formatting in the UK while doing so, is yet another paradox discussed in this chapter.

Along with consideration of the paradoxical aspects of Peel's public identity and tenure at the BBC, this chapter also provides an assessment of the theoretical contributions of this study, which, as it turns out, also appear to be somewhat contradictory. For example, while this research shows Peel's persona to have been multifaceted and shifting, Horton and Wohl (1956) conceptualized the successful broadcast persona as highly scripted and consistent over time. Similarly, while Goffman's work on "broadcast talk" was a useful analytical tool in assessing Peel's on-air performance, it is inadequate in terms of capturing fully or accounting for the many contradictions of Peel's on-air persona. Finally, this chapter ends with suggestions for future research related to the elements of successful broadcast personae.

### **Peel's Paradoxical Persona**

Among the most paradoxical aspects of Peel's persona was his presentation of himself as both amateur/professional and fan/gatekeeper. As unmistakably contradictory public identities, these dual roles may suggest to some a lack of integrity, and therefore could be cause to question his authenticity. Yet, ironically, it was Peel's authenticity that both fans and music critics alike most often commented upon. This apparent contradiction raises essential questions about the concept of authenticity, as well as its role in the creation of successful broadcast personae.

As detailed in Chapters 5 through 7, Peel's on-air presentation was that of an unpretentious amateur who, having just walked in off the street, had been given the opportunity to share his love of music with his listeners. One of the ways in which he affected a blithe amateurism was in his celebrated inability to manage the equipment in the broadcast studio. A self-proclaimed Luddite, he once told a reporter, "The changes in

technology have largely worked against me” (Garfield 1998: 265). That the opposite was true provides an important insight into Peel’s construction of his public identity and persona. He was notorious for playing the records at the wrong speed, but as Parker (2007), who worked with Peel on Radio One in the 1970s, explained, this was not because of Peel’s ineptitude:

[I]t was quite easy to do because a lot of the records that he had in those days were 12” records, and they could’ve been 33rpm or 45rpm, you know, and quite often the sleeve design didn’t actually tell you at what speed it was supposed to be played....and quite often with the music you couldn’t tell even when you put the needle on the record what speed it was supposed to be either. Especially with some of the electronic things by bands like Kraftwerk, it could go on for ages before you realized it was at the wrong speed (Parker 2007).

A storied example of this problem occurred when Peel played a tape of a new album composed of instrumental compositions by guitarist Robert Fripp and keyboardist Brian Eno. He played the entire album—backwards. Eno was listening to the broadcast and called the BBC. He told the operator, “I must speak to John Peel, he’s playing my album backwards. That’s what they all say, sir,” replied the switchboard operator before hanging up on him (Garner 2007: 81).

What might have been a liability for another broadcaster only added to Peel’s credibility with many of his listeners. A Peel tribute album was titled “Right Time, Wrong Speed;” and a website dedicated to archiving recordings of his radio programs shares the same title. But Peel was far from “a bumbler,” as Rothenbuhler (2006) called him. Both the “mumbling Scouse” accent (Long 2007) he affected and his apparent inability to master the technical aspects of his profession functioned to mask the sophistication of his performance. As Parker (2007) observed, “[Peel] didn’t sound very



professional, but that's because the professionalism was unseen. It was very subliminal. It's very hard to talk to people and to draw them in as countless DJs on countless radio stations prove everyday by not doing it very well."

Peel's presentation of himself as an amateur should be understood, then, as an essential part of his carefully crafted everyman persona. It worked for him on his Radio Four program because it made the people he interviewed feel very comfortable with him. It worked equally well with his younger Radio One listeners, who saw him first and foremost as a person who shared their passion for the music and, perhaps equally importantly, as the obverse of a slickly professional DJ with little interest in anything other than ambitious self-promotion. Finally, presenting himself as an amateur allowed him to create the kind of ageless persona that allowed him into his 40s, 50s, and even his 60s to continue presenting music made by teenagers with the enthusiasm of one of their peers. That he maintained his passion throughout his nearly 40-year career with Radio One is one of the keys to his rapport with an audience that ranged in age from 14 to 50 (Garner 2007). Adding further to this rapport was his disdain for pretension, which was at the heart of his dismissal of the so-called "progressive bands" of the late 1960s and early 1970s that aspired to turn rock into an art form and also fueled his equally passionate embrace of the punk movement in the mid 1970s, which privileged passionate amateurism over "lifeless textbook correctness" (MacDonald 1997: 9).

As a number of his colleagues interviewed for this study (i.e. Kattenhorn, Parker, and Lycett) pointed out, Peel was first and foremost a fan. Yet he had the discernment of a connoisseur who is never willing to accept anything, regardless of the source, at face value. He was not, as Parker (2007) observed, like many of the other DJs at Radio One

inasmuch as “he actually listened to the records. So many people would say, ‘Oh, here’s the new one from U2! Let’s stick it on it’s bound to be good.’ He’d listen to it and he’d say, ‘It’s rubbish! I’m not playing it.’”

In a posthumous tribute to Peel, his friend Charlie Gillett (2004) observed that Peel created an on-air model “unachievable for anyone else.” He was “the epitome of the DJ who plays only what he wants to play,” said Gillett. “He was in America in the 1960s when a whole lot of maverick people were let loose on FM radio to play what they liked, and I think he got infected with that idea....” Peel brought the concepts of the nascent American underground back to the UK from California early in 1967. At the moment that many of his like-minded peers were re-inventing music radio on FM in the US, Peel set about reinventing music radio in the UK. But what set Peel apart was his atypical approach to the DJ’s gatekeeper role. As Gillett noted, “Those of us who want to do what he did only do so because we’re convinced we like the right things. I’m very snobby that way. But he wasn’t like that at all.” In fact, as Peel told Walters in 1987, he was quite happy to be wrong. “I quite like that process of being quite regularly, and consistently, wrong. I think it’s quite healthy” (Peel, Walters 1987: Pt.4).

Peel was, of course, famous for such self-deprecating remarks, which in this case operated discursively to downplay his gatekeeper role. Like the amateurism he affected on the air, Peel’s almost ritualistic self-deprecation appears to have been an important part of the balancing act he performed to reconcile the contradictions inherent in his life and on-air persona. Contrary to his statement about making mistakes, Peel was consistently “right” far more often than he was “wrong” in his role as a gatekeeper and tastemaker. Discussing some of the factors responsible for the widespread perception of

Peel as an authentic radio presence, Long (2006) stressed Peel's famously idiosyncratic taste and remarkable record of backing musical acts and genres that would later be recognized as watershed moments and movements in contemporary music history: "What defined Peel's taste was his prescience in being 'first' to spot innovations in the form of bands or groups of bands sharing a sound, disseminating those sounds and in turn contributing to an understanding of popular music's cyclical, rejuvenating spirit" (40).

Although Peel's taste and presentation of himself as an amateur rather than a glibly slick professional were crucial factors in his creation of an authentic on-air persona, these elements alone fail to account for the almost religious trust his most devoted fans placed in him. A key element of this trust was Peel's ability to obscure his gatekeeping role, which he achieved primarily through audience-centered address. He claimed that he did not consider his role on Radio One to be that of a tastemaker at all, but rather as a surrogate for his listeners. Unmistakable in his radio talk was the assumption that his audience shared his intelligence, musical sophistication, and, most of all, his passion. He considered his programs acoustical spaces belonging by rights not to the BBC or to himself, but to his audience. With apparent effortlessness born of rigorous restraint and by adopting a low-key, audience-centered on-air presence, Peel succeeded in both undercutting the force of his ambition and resolving the inherent contradictions in his public identity and address.

Yet another important paradox in Peel's persona relates to the juxtaposition of his on-air everyman identity and his actual privileged class position in English society. He was, as his critics never tired of pointing out, an upper-middle-class landowner (e.g. Burchill 1999). His father had been a successful cotton merchant in Liverpool, and Peel

was educated in one of the premier private schools in England; he was every inch a product of the English elite. Yet he presented himself on the air as an ordinary middle-class father of four devoted to his family and the fortunes of the Liverpool football club. That he was an equally ardent champion of several generations of musical outsiders further complicated his persona. Yet evidence suggests that he was comfortable with the contradictions that so confounded his critics. As he told Walters in 1987,

When I go and see bands like The Fall, I don't encounter many other 48 year old fathers of four. I always say that I feel out of place, but funnily enough I don't. I still think of myself as being the same age as the other people there. I've always liked what I liked entirely independently of everything that was going on around me, and of the tastes and appetites of the people who were my friends at the time. There's never really been anybody with whom I shared those tastes even here at Radio One (Peel, Walters 1987: Pt 4).

This attitude, which may be traced to the rejection he perceived from his peers in high school, endeared him to fans of all ages, who regarded his taste in music as authentic and either ignored or dismissed as irrelevant all considerations of age or class.

The way in which Peel's persona both exploited and downplayed his upper-class roots is among the most singular aspects of his persona. He was unique among popular DJs, for example, in quoting Ancient Greek and Roman scholars as a way of introducing an American rap duo or for correcting with the precision of a favorite school master the grammatical and spelling errors he found in listeners letters. His 1960s program, *The Perfumed Garden*, which, as detailed in Chapter 4, revolutionized popular music radio in the UK in part because of his inclusion of poetry and literature with avant-garde music.

The way in which Peel dealt with his class contradictions is also reflected in and consistent with the way he managed perceptions about his own celebrity, which by the

end of his life was significant. His almost ritualistic refutation of the carefully constructed concept of radio DJs as stars of equal (and apparently in the minds of some of his colleagues, greater) proportions than the musicians whose records they played only added to his credibility. He had no interest in the idea of a DJ as a celebrity. As alluded to earlier, he discarded the mode of speech he had been trained to use in his elite private school in favor of a “Scouse mumble” (Long 2006: 40). He first adopted the downmarket speech of blue-collar Liverpool in imitation of The Beatles, who had themselves elected to exaggerate their accents, according to John Lennon, who claimed they had done so to underscore their working-class origins and allegiance (Blackburn and Ali 1971). While it may be true, as Lennon suggested, that The Beatles’ adopted a pronounced Liverpool accent also had political significance, Peel’s initial imitation of their mode of speech was largely pragmatic. As noted in Chapter 4, it served to jump start his nascent radio career in the US in the wake of The Beatles’ virtual conquest of the country’s popular-music culture in 1964. The fact that Peel maintained his “Scouse mumble” on the air after returning to the UK in 1967 suggests that he did so both to downplay his class advantage and underscore his everyman persona. His adopted blue-collar accent, as well as his identification with Liverpool and its football club, were also perceived by listeners and used by Peel as a political statement in a country still riven by class-consciousness.

Although undoubtedly a product of self-conscious construction, Peel’s everyman persona should not be considered entirely inauthentic. As detailed in previous chapters, his passion for rock ‘n’ roll and football had marked him as an outsider when he was a student at Shrewsbury, the elite private school established to train its charges to join the ranks of the country’s ruling class. As detailed in a previous chapter, the rebellious Peel

refused to embrace his classmates' ambitions and did all he could to stay out of step with them (BBC 2005).

Throughout his career in the UK Peel was selective in reflecting the values of his privileged upbringing. For the most part he affected a kind of cheerful amateurism designed, as discussed above, not only to understate his role as a gatekeeper, but also to set himself apart from what he saw as the glib professionalism of the commercial broadcasters with whom he worked on Radio London. Later, at Radio One he worked to distinguish himself from his more ambitious colleagues who looked at radio as merely a stepping stone to a more lucrative career as a television personality (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005). Peel had no such ambitions, and in fact spent much of his career deconstructing the reflected glamour associated with DJs on Radio One in an attempt to make the job, like the music he preferred, less pretentious.

That lack of pretension was further underscored by Peel's tireless championing of the BBC's role as a non-commercial, public-service broadcaster. That Radio One is a non-commercial network was key to Peel's credibility with youthful listeners, in particular, who "understood 'non-commercial' to mean free of overt corporate control, which for Peel, in particular, translated into a certain degree of trust and added legitimacy" (Coolidge, Wright 2007: 10). Listeners clearly regarded the wildly diverse and sometimes obscure music played on Peel's program as worthy of their attention first because it was marked with Peel's imprimatur and, second, because of their perception that it was there only because of his passion for it and not because a record company promoter had persuaded the station to play it. As Kattenhorn (2007) stated, Peel's only

criterion for choosing the music he played on his programs was that he liked it and wanted to share it with his audience.

It was his incorruptible passion, then, that gave Peel the authority and authenticity that enabled him to play a significant role in helping to upset the established order of the music business in the UK. Yet another important paradox of Peel's persona and career was his stance toward the music business. Although he was anti-corporate and anti-commercial when it came to the major record labels, he was a major force in promoting the commercial careers of independent artists. Perhaps the best expression of this paradox is this excerpt from a musicians' blog following Peel's death:

Peel...made possible, nurtured and presided over a musical ecosystem that was entirely commercial. By ensuring that 90% of the records he played were things you couldn't hear anywhere else on the radio, he created a non-commercial climate in which small independent labels could thrive—commercially. Like some kind of greenhouse, his nightly program protected all sorts of delicate plants from the cold winds of commerce, at least until they were big and tough enough to make it on their own. His disregard for money and hype actually redistributed money and hype in more deserving directions" (Imomus, 2004).

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that Peel's on-air persona was considered authentic precisely *because* of its complexities. If Peel's case serves as a guide, an authentic persona depends on and is, in fact, constructed from a complex and sometimes even contradictory set of human traits and behaviors. Guignon's description of authenticity as the "ability to form an integrated self through wholehearted commitments, that is, through standing for something" reflects the layers of meaning built into the concept of authenticity, as well as its core constituents of passion and focus (2004: 155-6). What might be defined as the end product of honest, uninhibited, and yet tempered expression of a full range of human feelings, opinions, and experiences, an authentic on-

air persona is not one that adheres to strictly defined roles or is easily pigeonholed. Instead, it is a mutable, boundary-crossing, and shape-shifting entity that nevertheless preserves the impression of self-containment and professionalism. That, in essence, is what Peel delivered to his fans throughout his four-decade radio career. His authenticity, in this sense, was the direct byproduct of his ability not simply to switch seamlessly between his identities as fan/gatekeeper and amateur/professional, but to embody them all simultaneously.

### **The Paradox of Public Service Broadcasting**

Like his persona, Peel's position at the BBC was rife with paradox and contradiction. John Reith, who retired from the BBC in 1938, would very likely be appalled at the notion of Peel as his spiritual heir, much less as "The Lord Reith of Rock and Roll," as Sweeting called Peel in 1993. Yet Reith might well have recognized the younger man as a brother beneath the skin. When he first arrived at the BBC some 30 years after Reith's departure, Peel, a barefoot, bearded, bohemian, was at first glance a most unlikely person to channel Reith's philosophy and approach to radio. Yet, as this dissertation has demonstrated, Peel not only shared Reith's mission, but came to *embody* the notion of public service both in terms of his belief in leading rather than following the audience and in educating as well as entertaining radio listeners. That Peel was able to continue in Reith's footsteps was largely due to his popularity. It was his popularity that afforded him some considerable autonomy within the organization and helped him survive in a frequently hostile environment at Radio One.

Yet another paradox related to Peel's long and complex relationship with the BBC was his construction, while working within the bureaucratic and deeply conservative



organization, of a global persona as an outsider and a maverick who championed the work of marginalized musical outsiders and revolutionized the programming on Radio One. The simple explanation for this paradoxical situation is his development of a consistently authentic persona that ensured consistent listener support. Success as a broadcaster on either a commercial or non-commercial outlet is always ultimately predicated on popularity. Certainly Peel's popularity was instrumental in enabling his proponents within the BBC to build a bulwark against the disaffection with his programming and his persona expressed by successive managers at Radio One throughout the 1970s and 1980s. As discussed in Chapter 6, Peel was not a particularly able politician (Parker 2007), but had the particular good fortune to be affiliated with Walters, who was a consummate politician more than able to defend Peel's idiosyncratic approach.

At the same time, however, one of the contradictions in Peel's personality was that while he took a radical approach to programming, his private-school education had instilled in him a profound respect for institutional authority. As a result, he was above all a pragmatist instinctively aware of the limits of his power who "did make one or two compromises in order to stay. As Parker observed, "[Peel] wasn't really this uncompromising, way-out-there kind of person determined to take on the BBC and all its might all by himself. It wasn't like that at all." Fortunately for Peel, as mentioned above, he had a very able champion in "[John] Walters [who] was lobbying very hard for him and was much more of an adept political player than Peel was. It's a big corporation, and like any big corporation politics comes into it a lot. Peel was not a very political person, but Walters was much cleverer" (Parker, 2007).

It is also true, however, that the BBC benefited enormously from Peel's contributions to the programming on Radio One and that although he was a regular target of virulent criticism from within the organization, he was also frequently used as a "totem" when Radio One management wished to promote its contributions to public service broadcasting in Europe as well as the UK. According to Lycett (2007), Peel's program was seen as a necessary evil by the market-driven programmers running Radio One in the 1970s and 1980s, but by the 1990s his approach had become the benchmark for the entire network. As detailed earlier in this study, in the 1980s and early 1990s the programming on Radio One was regularly assailed by Conservative MPs who could not understand why public funds should be expended to support a network whose programming was indistinguishable from the output of the commercial popular music stations that had been proliferating in the UK since the early 1970s (Beerling 2007). And while it is true that the audience for Radio One declined precipitously when new management introduced radical changes in both the programming and the on-air presenters in the early 1990s, the network's declining audience cannot be dismissed entirely as a failure on their part. It is a central paradox of public service broadcasting (both in the UK and in the US) that while it is necessary to demonstrate that a significant audience is listening to the programming, it is equally important to show that the programming is sufficiently different from the crowd pleasing fare offered by the commercial broadcasters. It is possible that had Radio One not turned in the direction of Peel's Reithian philosophy of leading rather than following the audience it may not have survived.

In the late 1990s Radio One, under a new manager, tempered the changes introduced in the early 1990s, while at the same time acknowledging Peel's iconic presence on the network (Garner 2007). Although by all accounts Peel never felt truly secure in his position on Radio One, that recognition must have given him some sense of vindication. It was also during that period that many of the younger DJs on the station began openly acknowledging their debt to him. It is a central paradox informing this study that Peel, whose on-air approach and persona have had such a profound influence on several generations of his colleagues at Radio One, was the one DJ the management initially rejected because his approach did not fit their conception of a Radio One DJ. That Peel seemed both bemused and proud of his progeny when acknowledging accolades from his younger colleagues is then perhaps unsurprising and offers an insight into his Reithian ambitions at the network:

I'm 59 in August....These days I find a lot of people working here, young people, who come up to me and make rather un-British little speeches about how they grew up listening to my program, which is lovely to hear, and then you can think to yourself, 'Well, perhaps you wouldn't even be working here if it wasn't for me,' and I quite like the thought of that (quoted in Garfield 1998: 259).

However, despite the suggestion inherent in this quote that he was only then beginning to be aware of his influence on the DJs who followed in his wake at the BBC, he knew better. From the very beginning, when he was working for Radio London, he had inspired others to emulate his example. One of the first was Bob Harris, a DJ hired by Radio One following Peel's success in the late 1960s (Harris 2007). Others followed in the 1970s (notably David "Kid" Jensen), but it was in the mid-1980s that Radio One

hired Peel's most ardent protégé, Andy Kershaw. In a posthumous tribute to Peel in 2005, Kershaw described his first exposure to his friend and mentor in the mid 1970s:

As a schoolboy, my discovery of the Peel program in the mid-1970s blew my horizons wide open. Music, and that variety of it, became my obsession....Those nightly tutorials laid out the breadth of my musical landscape. And they must have taught me a great deal about how to communicate with listeners as equals and establish an almost one-to one relationship with them.

Once John had pointed to the horizon, there was no stopping me and within a few swift years I arrived at Radio One in the summer of 1985 (Kershaw, 2005).

Although Kershaw shared Peel's Reithian programming philosophy, he did not always share Peel's taste in music. "We're not here to give people what they want, but what they didn't know they wanted. Even if that could often mean, in John's case, the downright unlistenable, it was vital that someone was trawling the margins on our behalf" (Kershaw, 2005). But Kershaw, described by Peel as a "great, but combative broadcaster" failed to learn some basic survival skills from Peel (Peel, Ravenscroft 2005: 88), and his career at the BBC serves to underline Peel's apparently paradoxical pragmatism.

Despite Peel's example of cautious, if often caustic, criticism of the programming on the network, Kershaw maintained a pugnacious attitude. Comparing Peel's approach to the management at Radio One to his own, Kershaw noted the paradox at the heart of Peel's persona and his relationship with the BBC. "Peel never pokes his head over the parapet. He likes to take a rebel stand, but he's not really a rebel. I'm the one who spends all my time fighting with Radio One management over whatever damn-fool policy it might be" (quoted in Hoskyns 1999). In May, 2000, Kershaw's contract with Radio One was not renewed. Commenting on the decision, Radio One controller Andy Parfitt called

Kershaw “an undisputed expert in his sphere, but,” he said, “there are always new DJs and new forms of music looking to break on to a packed Radio One schedule. It is essential Radio One keeps moving and keeps changing, providing space to showcase the newest talent” (Gray 2000). Clearly popularity, as Peel recognized, has its limits. For Peel challenging the audience not the BBC was the ultimate goal, and while he was not averse to regularly offering his generally negative opinion of the programming on Radio One, as he told Walters in 1987, his ambition was not to remake the network in his image but rather to present an alternative to the standard fare offered on Radio One. All of which would suggest that the key to understanding Peel’s almost unparalleled longevity on the network lies in the fact that while he did challenge the status quo, in the end rather than threatening it, as he noted many times, he served as a “safety valve” for an organization that has to be all things to all people.

Functioning as the network’s “safety valve” is not an easy role, as Annie Nightingale, hired as the first female DJ in 1969 and still working for Radio One in 2008, was quick to attest. Playing this role “can be a tough ride sometimes, and [Peel] rode it out, as well....[H]e paved the way for me and, hopefully, he paved the way for a lot of people....And that’s why I think it’s important for me to keep doing what I do” (2007).

Kattenhorn, however, is less sanguine in her assessment of the possibility that Nightingale and others will be able to “Keep It Peel.” In 2008, Kattenhorn worked as a producer with some of the DJs who took Peel’s place on Radio One. In her opinion, because of a variety of factors, not the least of which is the radical shift in the way that young people now listen to the radio and the ways in which they “discover” new music, no one DJ will ever again have Peel’s broad popularity and influence:

I think each presenter has their own fans, but the community now is fragmented. John drew together a lot of disparate people and that was their focal point and now there isn't that focus there anymore. People are finding out about music in different places and there's not that overlap anymore because with John there was a time where you could meet people who were interested in music and you had that shared experience of the John Peel show and now you can meet people who are interested in music and there's no hub anymore. There's no one central place that everyone goes to (Kattenhorn 2007).

One of the paradoxical aspects of Peel's career, as he often noted, is that it would have been impossible for him to accomplish all that he did without the support (albeit often reluctant) of the BBC. That the BBC's support of Peel was often begrudging reflects the reality of a state-run bureaucracy. As the record producer Steve Albini observed, bureaucratic organizations like the BBC are not designed to nurture idiosyncratic visionaries like Peel:

“[That]...implies that there's an institutional way to provide for genius and I don't think that's the case. I think there are people like John Peel who foster genius and there's no way you can institutionally provide for that. That's the provenance of individual genius” (quoted in Coolidge, Wright 2007: 7).

But at the same time, without the resources of a giant organization like the BBC, it would have been impossible for Peel to develop the constituency necessary to propagate his “genius.” One of the few scholarly works focusing on Peel's influence suggests that he is an example of the power of individual agency and that his career stands as a refutation of the long-standing “social science wisdom...that individual persons just do not have this kind of power, and if they do, it is only because of remarkable opportunities provided them by social structures” (Coolidge, Wright 2007: 4). But the BBC is a unique social structure. It is an autonomous organization supported by a tax imposed on everybody in

the UK who owns a television or a radio. The BBC offered Peel a singular opportunity and he was always the first to acknowledge its unique role in his career. “People always think you say this because it's job-preservation,” he told a reporter, “but the great thing about the BBC is that they genuinely don't interfere in the content of the program, and never have at all....I can't believe there are many other stations on earth where I'd be allowed that freedom” (quoted in Sweeting 1993).

Nightingale and other DJs who have inherited Peel's evangelical spirit are the ones behind the vow to “Keep It Peel.” But Peel managed to carve out an almost unassailable niche within the BBC. It is unlikely that any of his younger colleagues will have the opportunity to develop that same degree of autonomy. Peel was the first, but paradoxically, he may well also be the last of his kind on Radio One. As for his legacy, it is telling that of the many DJs who have attempted to follow his example since 1967, only Nightingale has enjoyed a career lasting beyond 10 to 15 years. In no small part because of Peel's richly complex persona, the turbulent political and artistic era in which he emerged, and his paradoxical role and history as a cultural intermediary in the UK, he has no equal. It would take a person of exceptional genius to construct a persona that accurately anticipated the endless shifts that occur in the popular-culture zeitgeist. Peel's “genius” was that he recognized and had the courage to embrace these never-ending cycles of popular culture ahead of many of his listeners, while maintaining the naïve ardor of a teenager. It may well be that Peel was, after all, as Selwood (2007) and others have suggested, a genuine “one off.”

## Theoretical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

The two primary theoretical approaches used as a foundation for this study included Goffman's (1981) work on the public presentation of self and Horton and Wohl's (1956) theories related to broadcast personae. Of these, this study's results varied most significantly from several of Horton and Wohl's (1956) contentions. The first of these is that the essential appeal of a mediated persona is its consistency. Whereas in "real" life people are inconsistent and prone to change, wrote Horton and Wohl, the mediated persona is comfortingly consistent. Peel's persona complicates this contention both because of its changing character over time and because his fans appeared to have found his inconsistencies comforting because they made him an authentic on-air presence. Indeed, a major argument advanced in this dissertation is that it was Peel's ability to change with the times was a large part of the success of his persona. As the blogger Imomus (2004) said of Peel,

He was enough of a chameleon to survive in many different cultural eras, and to make sure he embodied the zeitgeist. Put the posh British-invasion Peel of his early 60s Texan broadcasts (which he used to play self-mockingly) next to the whispering hippy...of The Perfumed Garden, then put that Peel next to the clipped, slightly sarcastic punk Peel of the 70s of the football and domesticity Peel of the 90s....They're all different Peels, and yet all the same Peel. He was as much of a chameleon as David Bowie or Madonna ever was, yet he had the charm to pull it off without looking calculating. Not bad going for a man who *seemed* always to be putting himself down" (2004).

In addition to being consistent over time, Horton and Wohl also conceived of a broadcast persona as an idealized, fictional creation. This study calls these contentions into question, as well. As Goffman (1981) observed, *all* human beings construct a public self; and in this Peel was certainly no exception. However, based on this study's analysis,



Peel's persona was for the most part a genuine attempt on his part to harness all facets of his personality and integrate them into his public presentation of self. Following Goffman (1981), every public performance is by definition "framed," meaning that it is constructed through selection, emphasis, and omission.

Peel's example, then, refutes Horton and Wohl's conceptualization of persona as an artificial and narrowly defined creation with little or no connection to reality. Their notion of persona, of course, was not only conceived in relation to television, but reflects the far less complex media environment of the 1950s, exemplified by performers like Andy Griffith, Lucille Ball, and Jack Webb. Peel's success, in contrast, suggests that a successful media persona in the postmodern, multimedia age must, of necessity, include the complexities of a fully realized personalized. This explains why Peel was regarded by critics and fans as the embodiment of authenticity in an age that witnessed the demise of authenticity in public life.

As conceptualized by Horton and Wohl, then, a mediated persona is a perfect lie, and more problematically for a pop culture performer, one with a relatively short shelf life. Bob Dylan, David Bowie and Madonna are among the few exceptional examples of performers who have shape-shifted from one persona to another during their lengthy careers. But while Dylan's authenticity was based on his artistic consistency, Bowie's was seen as the antithesis of authenticity for an age that had lost its faith, a persona Madonna has taken to its logical extreme in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

On the other hand, Peel's authenticity, like that of Dylan, was predicated on the need to change with shifts in the popular culture landscape. Yet rather than a cynical opportunist, he was simply true to himself and his passions. He married, he had children,

and his tastes changed as his life and the music evolved. He sometimes complained that some of his listeners expected him to stay frozen in the moment that they began listening to his program. They expected him to continue playing the music of *their* youth, but Peel was, as he suggested to Walters in 1987, a pop cultural Peter Pan who, even while he was aging physically, remained all his life a teenager in thrall to the most challenging contemporary popular music. Rather than ironing out the contradictions and the complexities of his personality, he embraced them and, in the process, mirrored his audience.

As the foregoing discussion suggests, an important theoretical contribution of this study is its expansion and development of the concept of persona to reflect more accurately the contemporary media environment. Future broadcast scholars interested in the elements of successful media personae may wish to expand Horton and Wohl's conceptualization of persona even further. A good place to start might be to investigate the careers and personae of Howard Stern, Rush Limbaugh, and Jon Stewart, whose apparent contravention of conventional broadcast personae appears to have been a major factor in their success. Are their personae as fully complex as Peel's, or are they more narrowly framed? And what implications might this have for their longevity? Scholars might also investigate the programming on Radio One in light of the influence of Peel's innovations. How is Radio One addressing its public service imperative in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What, if any, is the role of public service broadcasting in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

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He has taught classes in English Composition, the History of Rock and Roll, and Radio and Popular Music at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga since 1995. He has worked in both commercial and public radio as a programmer and presenter since 1972.